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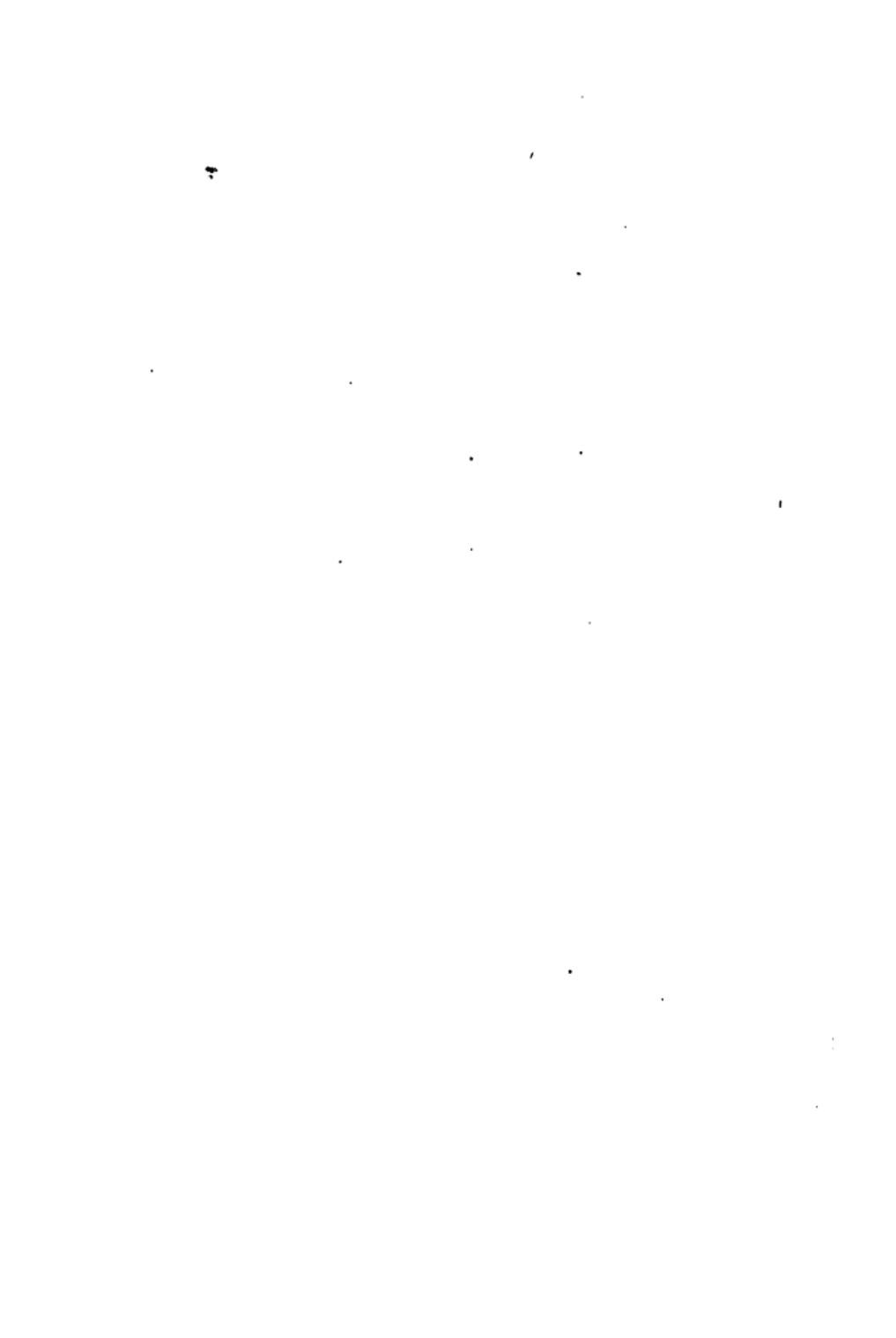
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2 November 1893.







INTERCESSORY PRAYER,

ITS DUTIES AND EFFECTS.

BY G. W. MYLNE.

FROM THE SEVENTH ENGLISH EDITION.

BOSTON:
E. P. DUTTON AND COMPANY,
106 WASHINGTON STREET.
1861.

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"THE EFFECTUAL PERVERSE PRAYER OF A RIGHTEOUS MAN
AVALETH MUCH."—James v. 16.

RIVERSIDE, CAMBRIDGE:
STEREOTYPED AND PRINTED BY H. O. HOUGHTON.

INTRODUCTION.

“GOLDEN vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints”—(Rev. v. 8)—perfumes for the Lord of Hosts, incense for the sanctuary on high,—such is prayer. The application of the sweet incense of the Redeemer’s merits imparts to the soul a holy perfume before God, as real in its existence, and infinitely more diffusive in its nature, than any material perfume is to the sense of man; and the breath of the Spirit, acting upon this imparted property in the soul, causes an active exhalation of the aromatic odors to take place, rising in prayerful effusions

to the Throne of Grace, and mingling with the smoke of the incense, proceeding from the golden censer of our great High Priest and Intercessor above. For Christ has shed a holy fragrance upon His people ; that they, in return, may delight Him with the sweet odors thus imparted to them. This is implied where it is said, “ All Thy garments smell of myrrh, aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made Thee glad.” (Ps. xlv. 8.) Are not “ *the ivory palaces* ” the temples of the Lord — His living people, who are said to be “ *builted* together for *an habitation of God* through the Spirit ? ” Ephes. ii. 22.)

Not one sincere prayer can leave the heart of the believer, without carrying along with it some odoriferous particles of the sweet perfume, with which the imputed merits of Christ have thus imbued the soul. How pleasant, then (even as Christ Himself is pleasant, in

His “sacrifice and offering to God for a sweet-smelling savor,” Ephes. v. 2), must the prayers of His people be to the Lord of Hosts! Such being the nature of prayer, we cannot wonder at the many assurances contained in Scripture that God is *the Hearer and Answerer of prayer*. The sweet odors, that ascend to the throne on high, are sent back again in showers of blessings upon the souls whence they proceed. And thus the earth, in sending forth its daily exhalations, does not more certainly provide the clouds, whence its own fructifying showers are after to descend, than the praying soul, by means of the Spirit, and the imputation of Christ’s merits, lays up for itself with God the means, by which the dews of heaven are to descend upon its vineyard.

The cry of God’s people is sweeter in His ear than the voice of any child is in that of the fondest earthly parent.

God yearns over His people in a manner which we, with our fallen nature and finite capacities, are unable to fathom, and which, in our “little faith,” we are very slow to believe. “The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; He will save, *He will rejoice over thee with joy*; He will rest in His love, *He will joy over thee with singing.*” (Zeph. iii. 17.) If such be God’s feelings towards His children, what unspeakable delight must He have in their prayers! O that we had some adequate idea what music the lifting up of our heart and tongue is to our Heavenly Father — what joy is experienced by Him, at the thought that He has to bestow upon us any thing, that we may have asked according to His will — and with what intensity of satisfaction the thing is actually given! We cannot have a more blessed subject of meditation than this, or one in which our practical comfort and interests, as Christians, are

more deeply concerned. May God give us grace to consider it more than we do, with deep earnestness, and with much profit to our souls. Thus shall we be led to much prayer and supplication before the Throne. The odors must not be shut up within the soul ; and if we wish them freely to give out their fragrance, we must, by the help of the Spirit, keep down those carnal influences, which act as a close stopper to the vials, in which the perfumes are held ; else, like the alabaster box of precious ointment mentioned in Scripture, the soul may have to be broken with the strokes of God's hand, that "the whole house" may be "filled with the odor of the ointment." Let it be our aim that this be the case with us at all times, and not only in the hour of affliction. May our faces shine continually from having been in the company of our Lord and Saviour. May they be "as the light of the morning when

the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds ; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.” (2 Sam. xiii. 4.)

INTERCESSORY PRAYER.

CHAPTER I.

THE DUTIES AND EFFECTS OF INTERCESSORY PRAYER.

“Ask, and it *shall* be given you; seek, and ye *shall* find; knock, and it *shall* be opened unto you. For *every one* that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” (Matt. vii. 7, 8.) “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall *ask what ye will*, and it shall be done unto you.” (John xv. 7.) “And *all things* whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, *believing*, ye shall receive.” (Matt. xxi. 22.)

What simplicity, and at the same time what an incomprehensible fulness, there is in the Divine affirmative ! We are so familiar with the redundancy of *human* affirmations, that we are utterly lost in the majesty, and unfathomable import, of God's simple Word,— in the wondrous meaning of His “ Yea and Amen,”— in the endless vistas of truth and blessing, that are opened up in the “ *shall*,” and “ *will*,” of His promise.

The reason why we are so deficient in *practical* Theology, is that we study so little the Attributes of God, and, among the rest, His faithfulness and truth. We must “ know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge,” in all its bearings upon the Divine character, if we would be “ filled with all the fulness of God.” Perhaps there are no texts of Scripture so difficult to realize, as the simple promises of answer to prayer. They seem to usher the soul at once into the presence of the Divine

Majesty ; to bring it into immediate contact with the unsearchable attributes of God ; and thus humble it to the dust under a sense of its own insignificance, and the limited nature of its own perceptions. It is with the earnest desire of bringing out this important subject, as regards the duty and effects of *Intercessory* prayer; that the author has been led to undertake this humble publication.

Two things are necessary in order to constitute effectual prayer. The *one* is that we pray in *faith*. “Therefore I say unto you, whatsoever things ye desire, when ye pray, *believe* that ye receive them, and ye shall have them.” (Mark xi. 24.) - “But let him *ask in faith, nothing wavering*, for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall obtain any thing of the Lord.” (James i. 6, 7.) Lord, increase our faith, that when we pray for others, we may have our petition !

The *other* requisite of effectual prayer is, that we ask what is *according to the will of God*. “And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing *according to his will*, He heareth us ; and if we know that He heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.” (1 John v. 14, 15.) Can there be any doubt that to pray for the souls of others is according to the will of God ?. Scripture gives us both precept and example on this head.

We have the *Precept*, — “If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, *he shall ask*, and He shall give him life for them that sin not unto death.” (1 John v. 16.) “I exhort, therefore, that first of all, *supplications*, *prayers*, *intercessions*, and giving of thanks *be made for all men*.” (1 Tim. ii. 12.) “Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perse-

verance and *supplication for all saints.*" (Ephes. vi. 18.) The Lord Jesus Christ Himself thus taught His disciples, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and *pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you.*" (Matt. v. 44.) He also confirmed the precept by His own most holy *example*; for, besides the numberless intercessions that He must have offered up in the days of His flesh, known only to Himself and to His Heavenly Father, three notable intercessory prayers, which he uttered, are left on record for our instruction. The *First*, when he said to Peter, "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat, but *I have prayed for thee*, that thy faith fail not." (Luke xxii. 31, 32.) The *Second*, is the remarkable prayer contained in the seventeenth of *John*, in which he prayed so tenderly for His Church and

people. And the *Third*, when, hanging on the cross, He prayed for His murderers ; “ *Father, forgive them*, for they know not what they do.” (Luke xxiii. 34.)

Scripture furnishes us with examples of Intercessory prayer being expressly commanded by God Himself. Of this we have a striking instance in the case of Abraham and Abimelech, as recorded in Genesis xx.

Abimelech had been guilty of a “ sin of ignorance,” and even such sins, in the sight of One, who “ is of purer eyes than that he should behold iniquity,” require the blood of sprinkling to wash them away. In this light were they regarded by the Mosaic law ; for it appointed special sacrifices to be offered by those who had sinned ignorantly. (See Lev. iv.) Abimelech, then, had been guilty of a sin of ignorance. He had been restrained from *actual* transgression by the overruling power of

God. "Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thine heart, for *I also withheld thee from sinning* against me; therefore *suffered I thee not* to touch her." (Verse 6.) What a commentary this upon the text, that "it is *God which worketh in us* both to will and to do of His good pleasure!" (Phil. ii. 13.)

Abimelech required pardon for his "sin of ignorance:" and *how* was it to be obtained? It must be *prayed for*; for thus God instructs Abimelech, "Now therefore restore the man his wife, for he is a prophet; and *he shall pray for thee*, and thou shalt live." And then, to show how the responsibility and free agency of man are made to work in harmony with the sovereignty of God, it is added, "And if thou restore her not, know that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that are thine." (Verse 7.)

We are not told whether Abraham

was instructed to pray for Abimelech by the personal appearing of the Lord, or whether it was by the silent working of the Spirit in his heart; but *this* we do know, that *God* “*waited* to be *gracious*” to Abimelech, till Abraham should *pray for him*.

We have another instance precisely similar to the above, in the case of Job and his three friends, for to these latter the Lord gave a charge of the same nature as that delivered to Abimelech, “Therefore take unto you now seven bullocks, and seven rams; and go to my servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and *my servant Job shall pray for you*, for him will I accept.” (Job xlvi. 8.)

These two Scripture examples set before us in a forcible manner both the duty and the effect of *Intercessory prayer*.

I. The *duty*. What God required of Abraham on behalf of Abimelech,

and of Job on that of his friends, *that* he requires of us on behalf of *our* friends, and of all for whom we ought to pray. Our hearts, indeed, as the temples of God, ought to be “a house of prayer *for all nations* ;” so universal in their embrace should be the prayers of God’s people. But we are *specially* called to pray for all, with whom we are more immediately connected by blood, or with whom we are brought into close contact, whether in thought, word, or deed, by the daily occurrences of life. This is particularly our duty when we see or hear of *others falling into sin*. (See 1 John v. 16.) Oh, what a sphere of duty this opens up to us ! How blessed it would be, if the sins of others always sent us to the Throne of Grace ! What a different effect would be produced upon the soul by the perusal of the public prints, with all their history of crime, if we always made it the *occasion of prayer* for our guilty

fellow creatures ! How much more sanctified our walks in the crowded city, or the place of gay resort, if what we see and hear at such times gave rise, not to vain remarks, but to *Intercessory prayer* ! Good Lord, do thou open the eyes of thy praying people in these our days, and in these our haunts of prevailing sin and vanity, that they may have a clearer view of their duty in this respect.

But, independently of such general occasions for intercession, the souls of *all our relations and friends* have a special claim upon our prayers. Do they not cry out, "*Come and help us* ?" Their being *unconscious* of their need of our prayers makes no difference in the urgency of that petition in the sight of God. When the vision appeared to Paul in the night, and there stood a man of Macedonia, who prayed him, saying, "*Come over into Macedonia, and help us* " (Acts. xvi. 9), there was

not, as far as appears from the Scripture narrative, a single man in Macedonia in a state to *desire* Paul's help ; and yet their souls cried out for mercy before God ;— the soul of Lydia cried out, the soul of the jailer at Philippi, — yea, the souls of many other, *then*, unawakened persons, cried out, “ *Come over into Macedonia, and help us !* ” Paul had no means of knowing, till the Lord revealed it to him, that the Macedonians specially required his help : but how many do we *know* to be in that condition ! There is not a relative that we have, whose soul does not cry out, “ *Come and help us* with your prayers.” We cannot receive a visit from a friend, or meet an acquaintance in the street ; we cannot receive or write a *letter*, but so many occasions of intercessory prayer are presented to the mind.

What a duty this brings before us ! “ *What a bondage !* ” some might be inclined to say. Ah ! God's service can

never be any thing but “*perfect freedom* ;” and those, whose hearts are oftenest at the Throne of Grace, find the greatest privilege in the performance of the duty. “*Oh ! taste and see,*” must be the word of exhortation addressed to our souls in this matter, — *taste and see*, both how much easier this habit of Intercessory prayer may become by frequent use, and also, what a spirit of true liberty it breathes upon the soul. The Lord grant us more of this liberty, and that every call to prayer may be as inviting to us, as the fresh air of the morning is to the lark, to rise and sing at “heaven’s gate.” Thus all our intercourse in life will be turned, as it ought to be, into blessing, both to others and to ourselves.

II. The *effect* of praying for others. We may read what this was in the case of Abraham and Job. God heard and answered their prayers (see Gen. xx. 17 ; Job xlii. 9) in pardoning those, for

whom they prayed. “ And this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask any thing *according to His will*, He heareth us; and if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that *we have the petitions* that we desired of Him.” (1 John v. 14, 15.) This is what faith believes, and what God, in answer to faith, performs. Do we know what it is to have brought the soul of a dear relative, or friend to Jesus, saying, “ *Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make him whole?* ” Do we know what it is, in the urgency of faith, and the warmth of desire, to have uncovered the roof, and let the spiritually paralytic man “ down through the tiling, with his couch ” of carelessness, and carnal security, “ into the midst before Jesus ? ” (Luke v. 19.) Have we heard Jesus, as it were, say to us, “ *Believe ye that I am able to do this?* ” (Matt. ix. 28), and have we answered, “ Lord, I believe, help thou mine un-

belief?" We may have prayed for many months, nay, for many *years*, and known during that time all the fluctuations of faith, all the suggestions of unbelief. We may often have gone to the top of Carmel, to try and discern the cloud of answer rising out of the sea of God's faithfulness. We may have been tempted, when faith was feeble, to cry out, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and" *they* "*are not saved.*" (Jer. viii. 20.) Do we, then, know what it is, under such circumstances of protracted waiting, to have seen a bright spot appear in the dark horizon of our hopes, to have seen prejudice gradually (it may be suddenly) disappear,—to have heard an inquiring remark, or received an encouraging letter? Have we witnessed the softened look? Have we perceived the first thirsting after the Word of Life? Have we felt the grasp of the hand, eloquently telling, by its altered

character, the change that has taken place within—its very pressure giving evidence that “*the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show them His covenant?*” (Ps. xxv. 14.) Have we thus seen not only “the blade ;” then the ear ; but, “after that the full corn in the ear ?” (Mark iv. 28.) Have we, in fine, seen those who were “sometimes darkness,” become “light in the Lord ?” (Ephes. v. 8.) Have we been enabled to bear witness to their consistent life, and to their blessed death ? O then, we know indeed the effect of prayer — we know what it is to sing, “I love the Lord, *because he hath heard my voice and my supplications.* Because he hath inclined His ear unto me, therefore will I call upon Him as long as I live !” (Ps. cxvi. 1, 2.) Oh, the joy, the peace, the satisfaction, that the soul experiences on such occasions ! Then it *feels*, what it has before believed, that God is

the *Hearer and Answerer of prayer*, and it can say, with the Psalmist, “*As we have heard, so have we seen in the city of the Lord of hosts, in the city of our God.*” (Ps. xlvi. 8.)

And, in very deed, the only way in which we *can* have a practical conviction of God’s faithfulness, in answering prayer, is to put it to the *test*. God does not teach His people by mere theory, but by the downright, matter-of-fact, and tangible dealings of His grace. And if we would have faith to grow, we must encourage it, by making it experience that it is not exercised upon speculation, but upon the solid certainties of God’s truth,—for faith, like sinews, becomes stronger, the more it is used. There can be no commentary upon the texts, which promise an answer to believing prayer, equal to that of having prayed, and then to receive the thing that we have asked for. They who have experienced the

truth of this will feel no difficulty in bearing witness to the *effect* of prayer. They can also affirm that it is a *blessed* experience, and one to be encouraged more and more. Some may be discouraged at having prayed long and earnestly for the salvation of a particular soul, and yet not having received any sensible answer to their prayers. Let us remember the injunction of our Lord, “*that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.*” (Luke xviii. 1.) It cannot be that God should prove untrue to His word. Has He not said, “*And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive?*” Keep, then, close to the promise—stir not from it: “*though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come,* it will not tarry,” — but at the end “*it shall speak, and not lie.*” (Hab. ii. 3.) How bold is the language of Scripture — “*it shall not lie!*” Hold fast by this word, all ye who are faint-hearted in prayer !

God must and *will* answer your petitions. It is an awful thing to give up praying for a soul, saying, or feeling that "*there is no hope.*" Oh, what is this but to call in question the attributes of God, to pour contempt upon His faithfulness and truth! Samuel thus addresses rebellious Israel: "Moreover, as for me, God forbid that *I should sin against the Lord*, in *ceasing to pray* for you." (1 Sam. xii. 23.) Nothing honors God so much as our trusting in Him,—nothing dishonors Him so much as disbelief. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the earth to show Himself strong in behalf of them whose *heart is perfect toward Him.*" (2 Chron. xvi. 9.) And, by referring to the verse before, we find that this perfectness of heart consisted in *reliance* upon God. Yet, "*because thou didst rely on the Lord*, He delivered them into thine hand." *For* the "*eyes of the Lord,*" etc. Would we, then, have the

Lord to show Himself strong in the conversion of those, who are near and dear to us, we must rely upon Him, and *never, never* give up praying for them.

There is one consideration that ought to encourage us much to persevere in Intercessory prayer. Both Abraham, and Job were led to pray for their friends *because* God had predetermined to have mercy upon them. This is clearly proved by the fact of God Himself having announced it to Abimelech, and to the friends of Job, before either of those Patriarchs had respectively prayed for them ; and, when *we* are moved to pray earnestly for particular souls, are we going further than Scripture warrants, when we draw the conclusion that, *because* God has purposes of mercy to those souls, therefore He has put it into our hearts to pray for them ?

But the *effect* of Intercessory prayer

is not confined to those, for whom it is made : and on this head we may draw a very choice piece of instruction from the case of Job, already alluded to. It is written, “*And the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his friends* ; also the Lord gave Job twice as much as he had before.” (Job xlvi. 10.) From this we may conclude that nothing is so likely to bring down a blessing upon our own souls, as Intercessory prayer. It may be said of this, in common, with every other debt that we owe to God, “*Bring ye all the tithes* into the storehouse, that there may be meat in my house ; and *prove me now herewith*, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, *that there shall not be room enough to receive it.*” (Mal. iii. 10.) There is an inherent cause for this. The very life and soul of religion is *love*. “*God is love*” — diffusive, all-embracing love.

Therefore, the more we “know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge,” not only in its bearings upon our own souls, but also in taking it for our ensample in our duty to others, the more shall we be “filled with all the fulness of God.” (Eph. iii. 19.) “*Owe no man any thing, but to love one another:* for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.” (Rom. xiii. 8.) All other debts we *may* discharge to the satisfaction of our creditors,—we may pay *money*, if we owe it, and have done with it;—if we have wronged our neighbor in word or deed, we may go and make him reparation for the injury; and in all these respects we are exhorted, “*to owe no man any thing*”—to keep out of debt. But to “*love one another*” is a debt that can never be paid off, so as to wind up and make an end of the account. It is a debt that we must ever be incurring, from our very position as the children of God,—the more we pay

it, the more we owe it, and as there is a continual stream of debt going on, so must there be a continual stream of payment. It were as vain to try and empty the ocean, as to attempt to pay off the debt of love, but pay it we *must* continually, if we wish to prosper. “Are we in any captivity” in our spirits, from depression, deadness of soul, or any other cause, let us *pray for our friends*, and see if the Lord will not “turn” our captivity. It may have arisen, perhaps, from our very neglect of this duty; but, whether from that or any other cause, the remedy held out here is the same.

This principle applies with special force to *deadness in prayer*. We often go to the Throne of Grace, and feel listless, not having any special object uppermost in our minds, and not knowing what to pray for. At such times let us begin and *pray for our friends*, and if our hearts expand upon the mention

of their necessities, we have gained our point, and while we are paying our debt to *them*, God will set us at liberty, as concerns ourselves; He will turn our captivity. Oh, how many blessed expedients are there to be found *within the sanctuary*, for forwarding the interests of our souls! Where the Spirit of God has recorded them for our instruction, may we not be slow to avail ourselves of their help!

CHAPTER II.

THE CANAANITISH WOMAN.—ABRAHAM
AND ISHMAEL.—THE FATHER OF THE
LUNATIC CHILD.

MATTHEW xv. 22–28.—What a beautiful instance we have here of “ effectual fervent prayer ;” and of its *availing much*, because it was *persevered in*. “ *And behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto Him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David, my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.* ” Observe the urgency of the poor woman’s request ! How much her soul was bound up in the recovery of her daughter ! She does not say, “ *Have mercy on my child*,” but, “ *Lord, have mercy upon me*.”

Is not this what *we* feel when we plead for those that are near and dear to us ? In praying for *them* we are praying for *ourselves*, not only because we consider them as a part of ourselves, but also because we cannot pray for them without bringing a blessing upon our own souls. And what reply did Jesus make ? “ *He answered her not a word.*” What a trial of the poor woman’s faith ! Oh, the blank that is implied in that short sentence, “ *But He answered her not a word !*” How soon is this read ! How lightly may it be noticed ! How soon forgotten, by those who have never been placed in the like circumstances ! But not so by all. These pages may meet the eye of many an one, who has brought a son, or daughter, or some other dear relative or friend, to have the demon of unbelief cast out. *They* probably know what it is, that Jesus should answer them not a word ; for there are few, who have their prayers

answered without their at *first* appearing to receive *no* answer.

Did not Jesus, then, *hear* her speak ? Oh, yes, He heard her, as much as He heard those who brought to Him the woman taken in adultery, and when, instead of giving them a reply, it is said that "Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, *as though he heard them not.*" (John viii. 6.) Jesus cannot do otherwise than *hear*. He hears the prayers of all his people at one and the same time, not only with the ear of capacity to listen, but also with the ear of willingness to give.

The disciples of Jesus came and "besought Him, saying, *Send her away*, for she crieth after us." (Verse 23.) And how often do our own unbelieving thoughts — the coldness of Christian friends in joining with us in prayer for one thought to be beyond the pale of grace, — oh, how often do these and other such causes cry the same thing to

our souls ! Verily, are we not all guilty in this matter ? Are we not all conscious of having, at one time or other, said, “ There is *no hope* for such a soul — he is so far gone in gross sin, in sceptical opinions, or in determined carelessness, that it is *no use*.” No use to do *what* ? No use to *pray* ! Satan often keeps us from *uttering* this, or from even deliberately thinking it ; for he knows that if we once saw ourselves in the glass with such an expression on our countenance, it would fill us with shame, and thus defeat his purpose. But, oh, let us beware how we suffer even the shadow of such a thought to flit across the soul. “ *No use to pray !* ” O Satan, speak plainly out at once, and utter that sentence in its native meaning, “ Too hard a task for the grace of God ! The blood of Christ not able to cleanse from this or that sin ! Such a heart more than a match for the Spirit of God ! ” This is what thou meanest to infuse into our

souls. O Lord God, do thou rebuke Satan, when thus he stands at our right hand to resist Thee in our souls. O say to him, in behalf of the soul that we are pleading for, "*Is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?*" (Zech. iii. 1, 2.)

And what said Jesus to the Canaanitish woman, when He did at last speak to her? "He answered and said, *I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" (Verse 24.) And so may Jesus, by the impressions, which He permits in our souls, *for the trial of our faith*, appear to answer *us*. We may think thus, "Ah! none but God's *elect* people can be saved. Is it possible that, if this soul were among the number, it could be left thus to sport with eternity?" Or the same effect may be produced by the mere fact of our *not* seeming to receive an answer to our prayers: but still

" 'Tis a pattern set for *us*,
How we ought to wait and *pray*;

None who plead and wrestle *thus*
Shall be empty sent away."

"*Then came she and worshipped Him, saying, Lord, help me. But He answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.*"

(Verses 25, 26.) This is another form of temptation, which may be permitted to assail us in Intercessory prayer. "Pearls are not intended for swine—it is wrong to cast them before them. Is it not doing violence to the nature of spiritual things, to think that they can ever find a place in such a soul as that? Will it not turn again and rend us?" Such are the thoughts, that will sometimes suggest themselves to the mind. But it is written for our instruction on those occasions, "And *such* were *some* of *you*; but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor. vi. 11.)

"*And she said, Truth, Lord; yet the*

dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table." (Verse 27.) And may not we say, "Lord, Thou hast pardoned *me*, who am a *dog* by nature, and not a sheep of thy pasture. Lord, wilt not thou pardon *this soul*? Is it harder for Thee to have mercy upon *it*, than upon me, a miserable sinner?" May it not be said, with reference to many an untoward soul, whom we have known to be converted in time past, "And of Zion it shall be said, *This and that man was born in her?*" And why may it not be added, for any soul for whom we have *yet* to plead, "The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the people, that *this man*" (also) "was born there." (Psalm lxxxvii. 5, 6.) "As well the singers, as the players, on musical instruments, shall be there" (Ps. lxxxvii. 7), and among them may be found many an one, who knows not *now* the songs of Zion, but who may, nevertheless, be among the countless multitude, that

shall hereafter sing the “song of Moses and the Lamb.” Let this consideration animate us to pray even for those, who seem the most unlikely to become subjects of grace. We may *yet* hear them say, “They that fear Thee will be glad when they see me: because I have hoped in Thy word.” (Ps. cxix. 74.)

“And Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, *great is thy faith; be it unto thee even as thou wilt.* And *her daughter was made whole* from that very hour.” (Verse 28.) The woman’s prayer was answered,—and *why?* *Because she persevered.* And *why* did she persevere? Because she had *faith*. Oh, then, *persevere.* God loves the importunity of prayer—the pleading that will take no denial from His love, nor cast a doubt upon His power. Strive to enter into the wondrous recesses of that word, “*Believe*”—at times how easy, at times so arduous to do! O

blessed Lord, teach us what it means ; show us the unutterable blessing, that is shut up in the exercise of that Thine unspeakable gift ! When *Jairus*, who had come to entreat Jesus to heal his daughter, received the message, “ Thy daughter is dead ; why troublest thou the Master any further ? ” it is written that “ as soon as Jesus heard the word that was spoken, He saith unto the ruler of the synagogue, Be not afraid, *only believe.* ” (Mark v. 35, 36.) We may have heard of some fresh act of gross sin — some fresh instance of recklessness — some additional proof of carelessness, or hardness of heart, on the part of some relative, or friend, for whose salvation we have long prayed ; and we may hear it as the *death-blow* to our hopes concerning him. We may virtually be saying to ourselves, “ *Why trouble we the Master any further?* ” — and may thus be preparing to dig the grave of our fondest expectations. At such times

let us remember the exhortation, “ Be not afraid ; *only believe.*” When the young man *Eutychus* fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead, Paul said, “ Trouble not yourselves, for *his life is in him.*” (Acts xx. 10.) And so may Jesus be saying to *us* concerning the object of our prayers. Nay, though we may be ready, by reason of the disgusting wickedness of some poor profligate, to say, with Martha, as she said of Lazarus, “ Lord, by this time *he stinketh, for he hath been dead four days,*” Jesus may be saying, in reply to our unbelief, “ Said I not unto thee that, *if thou wouldest believe, thou shouldest see the glory of God ?*” What soul can resist the cry, “ *Lazarus, come forth ?*” And so may *our Lazarus* come forth from the tomb, “ bound hand and foot ” with the grave-clothes of his former unbelief, and Jesus shall say, “ *Loose him and let him go.*” (John xi. 44.) Oh then, when we are inclined to faint in prayer, let

these words be written on our memory in letters of gold, “*Be not afraid, only believe.*”

Genesis xvii. 18. — “And Abraham said unto God, *O that Ishmael might live before Thee!*” Abraham had just had a renewal of God’s promise that he should have a son of Sarah his wife, and *that* son to be the progenitor of Him, in whom all generations of the earth should be blessed. *Isaac* was to be the child of promise, embodying in himself, through grace, all that a godly father could desire for his son. On *him* the parental eye was to rest with complacency, not only as being the appointed channel of the covenant blessing, but also as being himself a child of God, and taught of the Spirit. But, with all the delight that must have entered into his soul, upon the contemplation of Isaac’s blessedness, Abraham could not forget his other son,

Ishmael. *Ishmael* was not a child of promise. No rays of covenant mercy surrounded his head ; he was to all intents and purposes, as contrasted with him who was yet to be born, an epitome of the world, and the ways of the world — as the gross darkness of the carnal state, compared with the light of spiritual life. Yet Abraham thought this no reason why he should not still love *Ishmael*, nor why it should not be in the power of God to bestow a blessing upon *him* also ; and hence the tender exclamation, “ *O that Ishmael might live before Thee !* ”

What the promised birth of Isaac (as far as Isaac’s personal salvation was concerned) was to Abraham, the conversion of a child is to every believing parent. It is a source of unfeigned joy, the subject of grateful meditation — the happiness felt by the parent being in exact proportion to his own realizations of the value of eternal salvation. But

does that prevent him from thinking of the souls of his children, who may still be in unbelief? Does it not rather stimulate his anxiety on their behalf? Does not his heart, it may be, yearn over some child in particular, who may seem to be still further than the rest from the way of grace? And, after the first burst of joy at witnessing, or hearing of decided symptoms of spiritual life in the case supposed, is not the next impulse to cry, "O that *Ishmael* might live before thee?" God *had* a blessing for Ishmael, and He said unto Abraham; "And as for Ishmael, *I have heard thee.*" (Verse 20.) Yes, and if we had twenty Ishmaels, we might bring them, one after the other, to the Lord, in full confidence that His mercy was as full and inexhaustible as ever. If we receive a favor for one child at the hand of a *fellow-creature*, we consider (and probably *he* also considers) that it is a reason why we should not ask of him a

favor for another. But, blessed be His name, that is not the way of our Heavenly Father. (Isa. lv. 9.) The more spiritual blessings we receive from Him, the more we are entitled still to ask ; and if He has bestowed His grace upon *many* of our children, that is the very reason why we should entreat Him for the *rest*, and consider that all the former blessings are only a pledge of those that are to come. For the excellency of the heavenly gift is so inseparably connected with the boundless liberality of the Giver, that when it is said, "*O taste and see that the Lord is good*" (Ps. xxxiv. 8), it means that, having tasted, we should go on to crave for endless manifestations of his goodness ; and if God loves the cheerful giver, he loves no less the persevering, faithful asker, because He Himself is of all others the most cheerful Giver. Then, Christian parents, come in humble confidence, and lay the case of your *Ishma-*

els before the Lord, that he may make them (as was not the case with the literal Ishmael) even as your Isaacs now are. Think of His almighty power — think of His boundless love — of the freeness of His grace — of His infinite resource ! Come with unwavering faith — for “the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them *whose heart is perfect toward Him.*” (2 Chron. xvi. 9.) Come in humble, yet persevering prayer, that God may say to you, as He did to Abraham, “And as for *Ishmael, I have heard thee;* behold, I have blessed *him.*” Can you in any way give more glory to God, than by desiring that all your children should be His willing subjects — that they should, *one* after the other, swear fealty to the King of kings, and bend in humble loyalty to the Lord of lords ? Your fervent prayer is, that your yet unconverted children should be among

the great multitude who shall forever sing, "Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb!" (Rev. vii. 10.) Thus your fervent desires come to harmonize, in their object, with the glory of the Most High, and He cannot do good to you in your children, without exalting His own great name. Surely, then, this is a case in which you may take to your comfort that blessed declaration. "*And this is the confidence we have in Him, that, if we ask any thing according to His will, He heareth us: And if we know that He hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him.*" (1 John v. 14, 15.)

Matthew xvii. 14-21. We may take another lesson on the subject of Intercessory prayer, from the case of the

man who came to Jesus after the *Transfiguration*, and desired of Him that He would heal his lunatic son. “*Lord, have mercy on my son, for he is lunatic and sore vexed; for oftentimes he falleth into the fire, and oft into the water.*”

What an apt illustration of the case of many a young man (nay, alas ! of many a man advanced in years) running riot in the ways of the world, following after its pleasures with all the frenzy of a madman, and passing through “the fire” and “the water,” of the many predicaments, into which he is led by his recklessness and debauchery ; health injured — reputation ruined — friends estranged — nothing but bodily danger and mental degradation staring him in the face ; and yet (with the infatuation peculiar to persons of that class, and from the long-exercised power of that tyrant, *habit*) still going eagerly after his own destruction. Oh, how many such are there in

the world ! Many a Christian has to lament a son, or a brother, laboring under this spiritual derangement. In such circumstances, it is very common to ask a Christian minister, or friend, to speak to the deluded young man, in the hope that kind counsel may have the effect of turning him from the ways of sin and shame. And who would say but that this is a course most proper to be pursued — nay, the very one that would commend itself to a mind taught of God ? But we must not stop here. The father of the young man in the Bible history now before us said to Jesus, “I brought him to thy disciples, *and they could not cure him.*” (Verse 16.) Now, of course this cannot be taken as a case strictly parallel with any thing in *our* experience, because neither ministers of the Gospel, nor any others, have the authority to bid unbelief depart, as the apostles had to cast out devils. But it shows us that we must not be satis-

fied, in such cases, with soliciting the friendly expostulations of *men* however excellent. It may also teach us *why* our desires sometimes are not fulfilled, viz., because we stop short here, and do not betake ourselves with earnest importunity to Him, who alone has the power of doing wonders. How edifying the language of the nobleman mentioned in John iv. 49 : “ *Sir, come down ere my child die!* ” How instructive also the words of Moses, in pleading for rebellious Israel ! “ And now, I beseech thee, *let the power of my Lord be great*, according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is long-suffering and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity, and transgression,” etc. (Numb. xiv. 17-19.) Upon this beautiful prayer is founded the language of the Collect, “ O God, who *declarest Thine almighty power most chiefly by showing mercy and pity.* ” And what a plea it is to bring to the throne of grace, in praying for a soul

dead in trespasses and sins, that God would *magnify Himself* in its conversion ! May we not on such occasions plead earnestly with God, and humbly reason with Him, upon the great glory that would accrue to him—the wondrous monument that would be raised to His power and goodness—by His plucking such a soul, as a brand, from the burning ? Every child of God, who draws nigh to the mercy seat in humility and faith, may be as bold and impudent as Moses was on this occasion, or as Abraham was in pleading for Sodom. We may often have to use the expressions of the patriarch, “Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak to the Lord, which am but dust and ashes. Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak.” “Oh, let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak but this once.” (Gen. xviii. 27, 30, 31, 32.) We may often, I say, have thus to *apologize*, as it were, for putting the long-suffering

patience of God to further tests on behalf of those who have tempted Him under circumstances of aggravated sin, and contempt of the divine law ; but *yet we are encouraged to persevere* ; for we cannot exhaust *the grace of God*, though Abraham soon exhausted the number of righteous men in Sodom.

When the disciples asked Jesus, “Why could not *we* cast him out ?” He concluded His reply with these words, “ *Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.*” And who can tell the effect that might be produced in reclaiming many a poor profligate, were we to set apart special seasons for fasting, and prayer, on their behalf ? It is not every one, that is able to *fast*, or who at all events, would find fasting have upon him the effect desired, — that of making him more able for devotion. But where it can be done with good effect, it must be a most important adjunct of prayer, not only because it

leaves the body lighter, and less of a clog upon the soul, but also because it helps us to realize (and this is no small matter) that we are *in earnest*, as to the object of our desires. But, although we have not the gift of fasting, this need not prevent our setting apart special seasons for private or social prayer, on behalf of those for whom we wish more immediately to plead. If this course were followed, we should oftener receive special answers to our prayers, and we might see those who are now possessed of many devils — raging maniacs, as far as the interests of eternity are concerned — “sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, *and in*” their “*right mind*.” (Luke viii. 35.)

Let us gather wisdom from all these blessed Scripture examples, and be instant in prayer for all our friends, who thus require our supplications ; “If God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth : and

that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will." (2 Tim. ii. 25, 26.)

We may here refer to the case of the *child* of the *widow of Zarephath*, who was raised to life again in answer to *Elijah's prayers*. We find it thus recorded in 1 Kings xvii. 19—22: "And he said unto her, Give me thy son. And he took him out of her bosom, and carried him up into a loft, where he abode, *and laid him upon his own bed*. And he cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, hast thou also brought evil upon the widow, with whom I sojourn, by slaying her son? And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the Lord, and said, O Lord my God, I pray thee, *let this child's soul come into him again*." We may have had the child (or children) of Christian parents committed to our care, and that principally with a view to their spiritual

good—the child may possibly be, as in the Scripture instance alluded to, the “only son of his mother, and she a widow.” Or, without having such a charge *formally* intrusted to us, we may, from peculiar circumstances, feel ourselves constrained to intercede for the soul, and to take the spiritual oversight of some young person. In the fervor of our desires, and in the urgency of prayer, we may bear the soul in question into the most sacred precincts of private devotion—we may lay it, as it were, *upon our own bed*, in the depth of feeling, with which we have taken upon ourselves the care of its spiritual necessities, and, overshadowing it with the wings of earnest intercession, giving utterance to the prayer, “O Lord my God, I pray thee, *let this child's soul come into him again.*” When Adam sinned and fell, spiritual life departed from him—his “*soul*,” in the highest sense of the word, was gone. And thus

all the descendants of Adam are born into the world, spiritually, *dead* — their “*soul*,” spiritually speaking, is *gone*. But when a man is born again, true life enters into him — his soul may be said to *come into him again* — conversion being to the soul what breath is to the body — without it there is no real life.

But hear the *result* of the prophet’s intercession, all ye, who find yourselves in the like position. “*And the Lord heard the voice of Elijah*, and the soul of the child came into him again, *and he revived*.” (Verse 22.) Oh the joy of being able to tell the Christian parent that your prayers have been answered — the desire of his heart accomplished ! Oh the heavenly satisfaction of being able to say, “*See thy son liveth !*” (Verse 23.) Welcome the post that brings, welcome the letter that crosses the sea with, such intelligence. Never to be forgotten the interview at which it has been first said, “*See, thy son liveth !*”

The God of the prophet is the God of every believing soul ; and *Elijah* had no more cause to say, for the parting of Jordan, “ *Where is the Lord God of Elijah?* ” (2 Kings ii. 14), than every praying soul has to say the same, for the conversion of one committed to its care. They, that have faith to use the prophet’s prayer, shall in due time receive the prophet’s blessing.

CHAPTER III.

THE DEAF AND DUMB MAN HEALED.—
THE BLIND MAN OF BETHSAIDA.

Mark vii. 32–37 ; and viii. 22–24. —
“And they bring unto Him one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech, and they beseech Him to put His hand upon him. And He took him aside from the multitude, and put His fingers into his ears, and He spit, and touched his tongue ; and looking up to heaven, He sighed, and said unto him, ‘Ephphatha,’ that is, ‘Be opened.’ And straightway his ears were opened, and the string of his tongue was loosed, and he spake plain.”

JESUS on several occasions, when about to say any thing of more than ordinary

importance, said, “*If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.*” (Mark iv. 23, *et al.*) By this expression He could not mean to allude to the *bodily* organ of hearing — for He knew that with *that* all were provided — but to the “hearing ear” of the soul, to which Solomon refers, when he says, “*The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the Lord hath made even both of them.*” (Prov. xx. 12.) And by this we are to understand that the soul of man must remain deaf to the effectual sound of the Gospel, and blind to all that has been done for the salvation of sinners, until the Spirit of God endue it with new organs of hearing and of vision, saying, “*Hear, ye deaf, and look, ye blind, that ye may see.*” (Isa. xlvi. 18.) *Then*, and not till then, “*the eyes of the blind*” are “*opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.*” Then does “*the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.*” (Isa. xxxv. 5, 6.)

What Jesus did to the deaf man, on the occasion above quoted, is the counterpart of what must be done for every living soul, before it can receive the glad tidings of salvation — *its ears must be opened*. They brought the man to Jesus, knowing that He alone had the power to open his ears. “*They bring unto Him* one that was deaf, and had an impediment in his speech; and *they beseech Him* to put His hand upon him.” Is not this a lesson to *us* to bring *our deaf ones* to Jesus? It seems to suggest the case of those, who may have heard the Gospel faithfully preached for many years, and yet have not received it. And why? Because they have not “*the hearing ear*,” without which the truth cannot enter into the soul. In the case of the deaf man in question, there was no want of some one to speak to him; *that* was not the reason why he heard not, but simply because he himself was *deaf*. And so,

the reason why many continue in spiritual ignorance, is not the lack of sound preachers to declare the truth to them, but that they have *no ears* wherewith to hear it. This is a case, that often tries the faith of Christians very sorely. They may long have prayed that a certain soul might be brought within the sound of the truth ; they have their desire, but lo ! it seems to produce no effect ; year after year passes away, and the soul in question remains unimpressed — the ear is fast closed, impervious to the Truth. Nay, it will often happen that, even under the most favorable circumstances, there is not received so much as a bare knowledge of the doctrines of grace, so that the soul cannot even give a reason of any hope, that it professes to entertain : there is an "*impediment in the speech,*" as well as deafness in the ear. They, who have spoken much on spiritual things to the unconverted, can bear

witness to the extraordinary degree of ignorance, even as to the *letter* of Christian doctrine, often evinced by those, who have for many years sat under the most awakening ministry. And what does this prove, but the truth of the Scripture declaration, that “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him ; neither *can* he know them, because they are spiritually discerned,” (1 Cor. ii. 14.) “If any man be in Christ,” saith the Scripture again, “he is *a new creature*” — or more literally, “*a new creation* ;” he must have a new set of faculties bestowed upon him — new eyes, new ears, new powers of speech, new reason, new heart, new mind, in fine, a new order of perception. It is not the turning of old things into a new channel — the investing of old faculties with a new power ; for the human *mind* is as completely ruined by the fall, as the human *body*. We know

that the *latter* cannot be patched up, so as to make it a receptacle of glory ; it must be taken down, and return to the dust, from whence it was taken. And so is it with the powers of the *heart*, and *mind*—they are altogether unsusceptible of spiritual improvement, and nothing can give us light in the soul, but the indwelling of the *Holy Ghost*. It is *this* that constitutes the whole energy, and works all the experience, of what is called “*the new man*” (Eph. iv. 24), and “*the hidden man of the heart*” (1 Pet. iii. 4) ; for we are told, that “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by *His Spirit*, for *the Spirit searcheth all things*, yea, the deep things of God.” (1 Cor. ii. 10.) By *this* may we not understand the *Spirit*, *as acting in the new man of the heart*? For in what

other way can it be necessary for the Spirit, who knoweth all things, to *search them out*? Again, it is written, “ Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the *Spirit* itself (or Himself) *maketh intercession for us* with groanings which cannot be uttered. And *He that searcheth the hearts, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit*, because He maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.” (Rom. viii. 26, 27.) The *Spirit* maketh intercession for the saints — not as *Christ* does, by meritorious atonement — but *in them*. Because they cannot do it for themselves, therefore they must have the Spirit, in the soul, to do it for them. And thus, when God (as in this passage He is said to do) “searcheth the hearts” of His praying people, *what* does He find there? Not their own minds, but “*the mind of the Spirit*.” So, in Galatians,

we are told, “ And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth *the Spirit* of His Son into your hearts, *crying, Abba, Father.*” (Gal. iv. 4.) It is the Spirit that cries thus within us ; or, as it is elsewhere expressed, “ *the Spirit of adoption*, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.” (Rom. viii. 15.) And once more — when our Lord was about to send forth the twelve apostles, He said, “ But when they deliver you up, take no thought how, or what ye shall speak ; for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. *For it is not ye that speak*, but the *Spirit* of your Father *which speaketh in you.*” (Matt. x. 19, 20.)

All these passages speak very plainly as to the nature of the change, that takes place in the soul upon conversion, namely, *the infusion of a new principle*. Jesus places the natural powers of our mind, and the new powers of grace, in striking contrast, when he saith, “ That,

which is born of the flesh, is *flesh* ; and that, which is born of the Spirit, is *spirit* ;" and this He said in order to show to Nicodemus the necessity of having a spiritual nature, before he could receive spiritual truth.

This, then, instructs us, not only as to the nature of the thing itself, but also as to what we must do with the spiritually *deaf* and *dumb*. If we would have them to hear and speak, we must bring them to Jesus in *prayer* ; that, as He opened the ear, and loosened the tongue, of the literally deaf and dumb, so He may give unto these a new ear, and a new organ of speech. He may for a time, as we have considered in a former part of this work, "answer us never a word ;" but we must not, on that account, doubt either His power, or His will. Or ever we are aware, He may pronounce the word "*Ephphatha*,—Be opened ;" and straightway the deaf ears shall be opened, and the string of

the tongue shall be loosed. For when Jesus saith, “Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him” (Mark ix. 25), who can resist His word?

Deafness is one principal cause of *dumbness*. If a man hear not sounds, how can he frame them? How can he, who never heard spiritually, speak the language of the Spirit? But if once the sound of Truth have entered into the ear of the soul, the new man can take up the sound, and give it forth distinctly. And thus it is that, in spiritual things, *hearing*, and the *power of speech* must go together; and when the truth has been received in the power, and in the love of it, we shall, sooner or later, be greeted with the *language* of Zion from those, whose lips have never uttered it before, and we shall have cause to say on their behalf, “He hath done all things well; *He maketh both the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak.*” (Mark vii. 37.)

The same lesson is taught us in the history of the blind man, whose eyes Jesus opened, likewise *at the solicitation of the man's friends*, as detailed in Mark viii. 22-25. "And He cometh to Bethsaida ; and *they bring* a blind man unto Him, and besought Him to touch him. And He took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town ; and when He had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, He asked him if he saw aught. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. And after that He put His hands *again* upon his eyes, and made him look up ; and he was restored, and saw every man clearly."

Jesus had various ways of opening the eyes of the blind. On the occasion just cited, *He spat upon the eyes* of the blind man. In the case of the man mentioned in John ix., He spat on the ground, and *made clay* of the spittle. "And He anointed the eyes of the blind

man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the Pool of Siloam." (Verses 6, 7.) In the case of Bartimeus, Jesus simply *spake the word*, as in creation, when He said, "Let there be light, and there was light :" for "Jesus answered and said unto him, What wilt thou that I should do unto thee? The blind man said, Lord, that I might receive my sight. And Jesus said unto him, Go thy way, thy faith hath made thee whole. And immediately he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way." (Mark x. 51, 52.) And so Jesus has very different ways of bringing souls to Himself, as to the *outward* means that may be made effectual ; but in *all* cases it must be the same Lord, that opens the eyes of the blind, spiritually as well as bodily.

We may remark here, that the case of the blind man mentioned in Mark viii. Jesus "*took him by the hand* ;" he was under the guidance of Jesus before any

- change had taken place in his organ of vision. And so, when we bring *our blind* to Jesus, He may be taking them by the hand, casting the stumbling-blocks out of the way, preparing the highway before them (Isa. lvii. 14), removing many prejudices from their minds, and subduing their opposition to the truth, when, all the while, there is no change apparent to the beholder. For when Jesus took the blind man by the hand, “He *led him out of the town*,” away from the busy haunts of men; that He might, in the privacy of solitude, have mercy upon him. And thus it often is with the conversion of a soul. We know not what under-current may be at work in a man’s heart, beneath the stream of *apparent* indifference, and conformity to the world. We know not what hidden conflict there may be—what twitchings of the conscience—what disturbance of the armed man, that has hitherto kept his goods in peace

— what inward drawings to search the Scriptures — what readings in private — what resolutions of amendment formed — what a shaking of the dry bones may be going on, preparatory to their being clothed with flesh, and standing upon their feet. (See Ezek. xxxvii.) How often has Jesus thus taken a man by the hand, and led him out of the town ; *and we knew it not !* Had we known it, we might have marred the work by our officiousness, or misjudged zeal. And thus the reserve generally manifested by a man, when there is the beginning of a work of grace within him — the extreme sensibility, with which he shrinks from making his feelings known to others — the longing oftentimes to be able to open the heart to a friend, and yet not having the courage to do so — the tossings of mind occasioned by misgivings, as to old principles of thought and action, without having any thing to substitute for them, — all this may be, and

often is, God's way of preparing the soul to receive His grace—and this is far better than if every inward agitation had worked itself to the surface, and thus been exposed to the gaze, and interference of many, who, with the best intentions possible, would only have spoiled the work. Does it follow, because we have brought our blind to Jesus, that He should carry on the whole work of their restoration *before our eyes*—that He should not take them by the hand, and *lead them out of the town*? Therefore let us not be disheartened, because we receive not *visible* answers to our prayers for such souls, but trust that Jesus may have privately *taken them by the hand*, to lead them beyond the range of our ken, for a season. For “the kingdom of God” in the heart is, “as if a man should cast seed into the ground, and should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, *he knoweth not how.*” (Mark iv. 26, 27.)

When Jesus had spit on the eyes of the blind man, and put his hands upon him, “ He asked him if he saw aught. And he looked up, and said, I *see men as trees, walking.*” (Verses 23, 24.) *Bartimeus* received his sight “ *immediately,*” and was able at once to see clearly, “ and followed Jesus in the way.” (Mark x. 52.) In this he was an emblem of those who *at once* receive the full blaze of Gospel light into their souls ; their opposition has been overcome, their prejudices scattered, their ignorance removed, by the *instantaneous* working of God the Spirit. But this is not the case in the generality of conversions ; most men, when they *first* look up to behold the hitherto invisible things of the kingdom of heaven, at first are only able to “ see men as trees, walking.” They have but an imperfect acquaintance with the way of grace — but a slight knowledge of their own hearts ; consequently their profession

must be uncertain, and their walk, in many respects, inconsistent — they see not clearly enough to follow Jesus in the way ; and *then*, perhaps, their praying friends are disheartened, the hopes of one day being thrown down by the discouragements of the next. How often has the expression of a confused view on matters of doctrine — a glaring misapprehension of Christian practice — the remains of sceptical opposition, or a transient fit of indifference — come down as a frosty wind, apparently to nip the bud of our fondest expectation ; or like water, icy as death, to quench (as we think) the incipient flame of spiritual feeling in the soul ! Yet all this may be nothing but the scum thrown to the surface, by reason of a healthy fermentation going on within ; nothing but a necessary stage in the recovery of their vision — *the seeing of men as trees, walking.* And therefore, on such occasions, it behooves us to

wait patiently on the Lord in prayer, that He would put His hands *again* upon the eyes of our blind ; that they may be perfectly "restored," and see "every man clearly," and that we may hear them say, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, *now I see.*" (John ix. 25.) And when we pray for our friends, that they may receive their sight, let us also pray for ourselves, that we may have discernment to survey the beginning, and the progress, of God's work in them, not with the eye of impatience or misconception, but with the ken of those who have had experience of the ways of the Lord, and who have learnt not to "scan His work in vain."

We may also observe, with regard to the special miracle that we have been considering, that *all* the stages experienced by the blind man in the recovery of his sight, took place when he was *still* out of the town. And thus many a Christian passes through all the stages

of spiritual illumination, before it is known to others that he is a subject of grace. Nay, many may *pass out of the world*, and none know that Jesus had taken them by the hand, and led them out of the town—that they have had their eyes anointed, and seen at first men, as trees, walking ; and then looked up and seen clearly. This may have been known to none *but themselves*, and to the Lord, who had led them into the solitude of their own reserve, and laid His hand upon them, “ and sent ” them “ away to ” their “ house, saying,” as he did to the blind man on this occasion, “ Neither go into the town, *nor tell it any in the town.*” (Verse 26.) We are warranted, I think, in building a charitable hope upon this foundation, in the case of some, who depart this life without having given so full a proof as we should desire, of their hearts having been under the teaching of the Spirit. They may have evidenced a *certain* .

degree of regard for the truth, have manifested *some* concern about their own souls, and all the rest have been shut up within their own bosoms ; *we* had looked for open confession of sin, and found it not — for the tellings of tender experience, and heard them not ; Jesus may have led them out of the town, and one day we may meet them among the great multitude, who have “washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”

In further confirmation of this particular view of our subject, we may take the case of *Elisha*, and his young man, as recorded in 2 Kings vi. 17 : “And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, *open his eyes that he may see*. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, *and he saw* : and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.”

“There is a natural body, and there is a *spiritual body*,” said the Apostle Paul (1 Cor. xv. 44), and spiritual bodies are as real in their existence as natural bodies — only they are not visible to natural eyes. The mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire, in real and spiritual existence ; but the young man had no eyes wherewith to *see* them. God, on various occasions, opened the eyes of his chosen servants of old, to see the wonders of the invisible world ; and Elisha must himself have seen the wondrous host with which he was surrounded, or he could not have prayed that the young man’s eyes might be also opened to see them.

When *Elijah* was about to be taken up, and Elisha had prayed that a double portion of Elijah’s spirit might rest upon him, the prophet answered, “Thou hast asked an hard thing of me ; nevertheless, *if thou see me* when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee ; but

if not, it shall not be so." (2 Kings ii. 10.) By which Elijah meant to say that, if the Lord opened the eyes of Elisha to *see* the manner of his translation, it would be a token that God would grant his request. The chariot and horses of fire, in which the prophet went up, would still have been present, whether Elisha had seen them or not; but his eyes being open to see them depended upon the special operation of God.

When God made known to Daniel that which was "noted in the Scriptures of truth," the prophet says, "And *I* Daniel *alone* saw the vision; *for the men that were with me saw not the vision.*" (Dan. x. 7.)

And in like manner, when the Lord Jesus appeared to Saul of Tarsus in the way, *he alone* saw the Saviour, and heard His words, for they that journeyed with him "stood speechless, hearing a voice, but *seeing no man.*"

(Acts ix. 7.) And that they did not

perceive any thing articulate or intelligible, in the sound, is clear from the words of the apostle in a later chapter of the Acts : “ And they, that were with me, saw indeed the light, and were afraid : but *they heard not the voice* of Him that spake to me.” (Acts xxii. 9.)

How forcibly the above passages bring before us the reality of unseen, angelic agency — of those heavenly beings, those “ ministering spirits,” who are “ sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation ! ” (Heb. i. 14.) The angels have bodies as real as our own ; countless multitudes are attending upon us ; and although the mind questions this, because it sees them not, their agency on the scene of material creation is not the less sure for being noiseless, unfelt, invisible. “ No speech, nor language ; *their voice is not heard* ;” and yet “ their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.” (Ps.

xix. 3, 4.) How much this ought to enlarge our views, as to the reality of invisible agencies in this nether world, and as to the possibility of modes of existence altogether foreign to our own, and imperceptible to our senses !

Now, if we take the above-cited passages of Scripture, as illustrating the blindness of the natural heart to all that is going on around it in the kingdom of grace, as well as to any perception of the invisible hand of God in the dispensations of Providence, what a wide field for intercessory prayer opens upon us ! How frequently, for instance, does it happen that, as Saul of Tarsus was journeying with his companions in sin and persecution, and the Lord Jesus appeared to him in the way, even so among a little knot of companions (if not in gross sin, at all events in carelessness, worldliness, or opposition to the truth) Christ may suddenly manifest Himself to the soul of one among the rest ; so that

he may be at once dazzled, humbled, and reformed by the brightness of the revelation, while his companions may only see, and hear that some extraordinary change has come over him, while they neither saw the beauty of Jesus which attracted him, nor heard the gracious words of love that were spoken to his soul — “*hearing a voice, but seeing no man.*” On such occasions, if we have a friend or relative, who has formed one of such a knot of companions, and are mourning over him, because his eyes are closed to what has taken place — instead of desponding, let us pray for him, as Elisha did for his young man ; “*Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see !*” — that the reflection of Christ’s glory may be seen in the face of him, to whom He thus appeared in the way, and that the soul for whom we are praying, may, by his sound doctrine, and consistency of life, be also led to inquire after the way of peace.

Or we may have a friend in attendance upon a dying bed, from whence a soul is about to depart and be with Christ. It may be as manifest to the Lord's people that the soul in question is going to glory, as the "chariot of fire and horses of fire" made known to Elisha that his master was about to be translated: and yet our friend's eyes may be fast closed, so that he has no perception of the "chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof." (2 Kings ii. 12.) And while others may be edified with the dying experience, and entering into the glorious anticipations, of the departing soul, *he* may see nothing in it, but the simple fact of the breath leaving the body, and feel nothing but the emotions that are common to flesh and blood. How earnestly, at such times, do we long that such a favorable opportunity should not be lost upon our friend—that the glory of that dying bed might lead to the conversion of his

soul ? Well, then, have we not every encouragement to use the petition, “ Lord, I pray thee, *open his eyes, that he may see?* ” Wherefore are such things written for our instruction, but to incite our faith, and to draw out the spirit of prayer ? And he, who opened the eyes of Elisha, to see the chariot and horses of fire, can open our friend’s eyes, to see glorious things in the departure of the dying saint.

Again, we may be in times of national or family distress ; every spring of earthly comfort may threaten to be dried up ; every stream of wonted pleasure be imbibited ; every hope of human assistance be removed ; to the natural eye all may be dark ; to the natural heart there may be nothing left but bare “ vanity and vexation of spirit.” How painful in such seasons to behold a man, whose soul cannot rise above the stern realities of human circumstance ; who cannot, by faith, lay hold upon the

promises, and discern the resources, of the Lord of heaven and earth, nor, amid the utter hopelessness of "the things that are seen" and "temporal," experience unutterable consolation in the things that are "not seen" and "eternal!" *This* also is a call to us to say, "Lord, I pray thee, *open his eyes, that he may see.*" Such seasons, humanly speaking, are calculated to make men think seriously; the complexion of events may have imparted a tone of soberness to their minds; *then*, above all others, is the time to urge our suit for them at the throne of grace, that God would enlighten their darkness, making them to taste and see His mercy in Christ to every soul that believeth, and, along with this, that God is a refuge and strength in the hour of earthly calamity, "a very present help in time of trouble." (Ps. xlvi. 1.)

We may have friends engaged in active military service, or in other circum-

stances of imminent bodily danger. The Lord may deliver them from perishing by the sword, "covering their head in the day of battle," and *they* not be able to recognise the gracious hand, that saved them from that, as well as from other perils. What prayer, then, can be more suitable on *their* behalf, than that God would open their eyes, that *they may see* "the horses and chariots" of God's invisible agency, to which they owe all their safety; and that their "eye" in beholding the protection of His kind Providence, may, by the operation of the Spirit, "affect" their "heart" (Lam. iii. 51) with a sense of their own sinfulness, and their need of a Saviour's blood to wash away their sin. And, in like manner, if we have friends among those "that go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters," we have encouragement to pray, that not only with the eye of outward perception, but also with the discern-

ment of an enlightened spirit, they may “see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep;” and that, whether it be by “the storm” being made “a calm, so that the waves thereof are still”—or by their being brought safe to “their desired haven”—they may with the heart and tongue of a converted soul, looking to Christ for His offered salvation, “praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men.” (Ps. cvii. 23–31.)

CHAPTER IV.

EZRA PRAYING FOR THE PEOPLE.

EZRA ix., and x. 1-14. — The object that we may have in view is, perhaps, not the conversion of a soul, but to bring home to the heart of a true Christian the conviction of having committed some special sin. In this also we have encouragement from Scripture example, by prayer and “supplication with thanksgiving,” to “let our requests be made known unto God.” (Phil. iv. 6.) The children of Israel, upon their return from Babylon, had forgotten, or, at least, disregarded, the law of the Lord their God, and had joined themselves in marriage to the Gentiles of the land. We find it thus recorded in the Book of

Ezra, in the passage above cited. "Now when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons ; so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of those lands ; yea, the hand of the princes and rulers hath been chief in this trespass." Then, how vividly does the man of God describe his emotions of grief at hearing of this abomination ! " And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and I plucked off the hair of my head, and of my beard, and sat down astonished. Then were assembled unto me every one that trembled at the words of the

God of Israel, because of the transgressions of those that had been carried away ; and I sat astonished until the time of the evening sacrifice.”

And what did Ezra do next ? Did he at once summon the people before him, and reprove them for their sin ? No, he humbled himself before the Lord his God, and *prayed*. “ And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness ; and having rent my garments and my mantle, *I fell upon my knees*, and spread out my hands unto the Lord my God, and said, O my God, I am ashamed, and blush to lift up my face unto thee, my God ; for our iniquities are increased over our head, and our trespass is grown up unto the heavens.” From this, to the end of chapter ix., is one continued confession of sin by Ezra on behalf of the people. It is not *said* that he made intercession for the people, that God would pardon them and teach them His ways, as

Solomon expresses it in his prayer at the dedication of the Temple : " Then hear thou in heaven, and forgive the sin of thy servants, and of thy people Israel, *that thou teach them the good way* wherein they should walk." (1 Kings viii. 36.) But that Ezra *did* thus intercede there can be no doubt, for it is implied in chapter x. verse 1. What, then, was the effect of Ezra's humiliation and prayer ? Let the Scripture history speak for itself. " Now, when Ezra had *prayed*, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men, and women, and children ; *for the people wept very sore*. And Shecaniah, the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered, and said unto Ezra, *We have trespassed against our God*, and have taken strange wives of the people of the land : yet now there is hope in Israel con-

cerning this thing. Now therefore *let us make a covenant with our God*, to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God ; and let it be done according to the law.” And not only so, but when all Judah and Benjamin were gathered together within three days to Jerusalem, “ and all the people sat in the street of the house of God, *trembling because of this matter*, and for the great rain ; and when Ezra the priest stood up, and said unto them, Ye have transgressed, and have taken strange wives to increase the trespass of Israel : now therefore make confession unto the Lord God of your fathers, and do His pleasure ; and separate yourselves from the people of the land, and from the strange wives ; ” — it is added, “ Then all the congregation answered and said with a loud voice, *As thou hast said so must we do.* But

the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand without, neither is this a work of one day, or two : *for we are many that have transgressed in this thing.*" (Ezra x. 9-13.)

Thus Ezra "bowed the heart" of all the men of Judah and Benjamin, "as the heart of one man," and *that* by means of *prayer*. Had he begun by reproving the people severely for their sin, or by inveighing loudly against it, how different might the result have been ! But Ezra betook himself at once to Him, "unto whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid," beseeching Him that He would "cleanse the thoughts of the hearts of Israel by the inspiration of His Holy Spirit."

What a lesson is this to *us*, when we, in like manner, desire to bring home to the heart of another the consciousness of any transgression, or of the indulgence of any sinful habit.

I. Let us begin, as Ezra did, *with confession of sin*, first for ourselves, and then for those, whose case we would bring before the Lord. The sin of others ought always to humble us, acting as a glass in which we may see our own shame ; and it is the apostolic injunction, that when we see others “ overtaken with a fault,” we should “ *remember ourselves*, lest we also be tempted.” (Gal. vi. 1.) We ought to pity our poor erring brother, or sister, and say, “ Ah, if thou hadst not been *my* fellow-sinner, thou hadst not fallen into sin.” We should smart for such an one, as he, who has often been wounded in the flesh, knows how to smart for others, when they are wounded. We should grieve for him, that he is causing so much trouble to his soul ; we should feel it, as though it were our own smart, our own *trouble* — confessing it to the Lord, as though it were our own *sin*. This is, I presume, what the

apostle means, when he says, “ *Bear ye one another’s burdens and so fulfil the law of Christ.*” (Gal. vi. 2.)

Reader, never pass by the sins of others, as though *you* had nothing to do with them ; but remember that you have *every thing* to do with them, even to take them up upon your own shoulder, and so bear them, in brotherly sympathy — in full consciousness of your own infirmity, and in deep confession of your fellow-sinner’s fault — to the throne of grace. How else can we fulfil “ the law of Christ ? ” Did not he bear “ our sins in His own body on the tree ? ” (1 Pet. ii. 24.) Did not He make our sins His own ? Did He not take them so completely on Himself, as to say in prophecy, “ *Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up, they are more than the hairs of my head ; therefore my heart faileth me ?* ” (Ps. xl. 12.) Let us strive so to fulfil the law of Christ, even as Ezra did for

his erring brethren. And what can be so effectual a help to our doing this, as to remember that it is only the grace of God constraining us, that keeps *us* from the commission of sins far more gross than any, which we may have to deplore in others. It is to such self-recollection that Paul alludes, when he says, “ For if a man think himself to be something, *when he is nothing*, he deceiveth himself.” (Gal. vi. 3.) And again, “ For *who maketh thee to differ* from another? And what hast thou that thou didst not receive? Now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it ? ” (1 Cor. iv. 7.) Let it also be a rule with us, never to be forgotten, that when we go to ask for mercy, we should always begin with *confession of sin*. This well becomes *us*, as sinners, for humiliation ; and it is specially due to the holiness and glory of God.

II. Let us also *pray* for our brethren

who are in fault, entreating the Lord that He would "give them repentance," opening their eyes to see their sin, and their hearts to receive suitable impressions of His grace. What wonders may not be wrought in this respect! Can we, under any circumstances, have better authority to betake ourselves to the promise, "that if we ask *any thing according to His will*, He heareth us?" (1 John v. 14.) What can be more according to the will of God, than that he "that nameth the name of Christ, should depart from iniquity?" Is it not said, "For this is *the will of God*, even *your sanctification?*" (1 Thess. iv. 3.) Therefore, when we see a Christian brother or sister fall into sin, let us not stagger at the promise through unbelief, but have "confidence" in Him, that gives the promise; let us *pray*, knowing that "if he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we have the petitions that we desired of Him." (1 John v. 15.)

As for ourselves, so also for our Christian brethren, we have to remember before God, “what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand, in the heavenly places.” (Eph. i. 19, 20.) This power is no other than that of the *Holy Spirit*—for Christ was “declared to be the Son of God with power, *according to the Spirit of holiness*, by the resurrection from the dead.” (Rom. i. 4.) And again, He is said to have been “put to death in the flesh, but *quickened by the Spirit*.” (1 Pet. iii. 18.) Of this same Spirit, it is said, touching His indwelling in the hearts of His people, “Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think, *according to the power that worketh in us*.” (Eph. iii. 20.) Let us carry this

blessed text along with us, when we have to intercede for our brethren—“Able to do *exceeding abundantly above all that we can ask or think!*” Then, let us not be faint-hearted, nor say, “How can I influence the heart of my brother or sister? How can I make them forsake their sins?” Truly, you cannot do so by your own strength, or by the persuasives of your own mind; for if you try to deal with them in this way, you may experience from their corruptions, or from their perverse tempers, what the seven *sons of Sceva*, the Jew, experienced at the hand of the evil spirit, whom they thought to cast out; for “the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye? And the man, in whom the evil spirit was, leaped on them and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.” (Acts xix. 15, 16.) Now, the reason why

Christians so often fail in bringing an erring brother to a sense of his sin is, that they endeavor to accomplish it in their own strength, and rely not upon the Spirit of God, *by whom alone* we can have any spiritual influence upon the hearts of others. Every channel of genuine conviction, with which we would impress the soul of another, must pass, as it were, through the person of *Jesus*, by the *Spirit*. No two things, in the whole creation, are more isolated from one another, than the “heart of man” is, in a spiritual sense, from the heart of his fellow-man; neither can you carry a spiritual road from one to the other by any *direct* means; every such road must pass, as I have said, through the sanctuary on high; for thus alone are the Lord’s people bound up together “in the bundle of life,” and kept “in the unity of the Spirit, and the bond of peace.” Let us not be deceived in this matter; for as, on the one

hand, “there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Eccl. vii. 20), so, on the other hand, there is not a saint upon earth, however excellent — however advanced in the divine life — whom it is safe to approach for the purpose of telling him his faults, in any other way. For although the child of God may, and *will* say, “Let the righteous smite me, it shall be a kindness ; and let him reprove me, it shall be an excellent oil, which shall not break my head” (Psalm cxli. 5), yet nothing can make him *act* according to this profession — nothing can make him receive friendly reproof at the hand of a Christian brother — but the influence of the Spirit. Therefore let us take care how we attempt to draw nigh to any man for such a purpose, but with the confession of sin to God, and much prayer that the Spirit would prepare *our* hearts for effectually giving, and our brother’s heart for humbly re-

ceiving, the intended exhortation. We have only to consider our own hearts, and look back upon our own experience, to account for, and to substantiate, this truth concerning even the Lord's people. Oh, what a life of prayer we ought to lead both for ourselves, and for our brethren ! Is there ever a moment, when we and they require not our prayers ? And besides the daily, and hourly, *common* necessities for prayer, how do we know when seasons of special trial of faith may not bring more than common necessity for prayer, and supplication ? And let us continually refer to the blessed examples that the Scripture sets before us, such as that of Ezra, which we have just been considering ; remembering that " all these things happened unto them for ensamples, and are written *for our admonition*, upon whom the ends of the world are come." (1 Cor. x. 11.)

CHAPTER V.

**DANIEL PRAYING FOR HIS BRETHREN.—
THE CHURCH INTERCEDING FOR PETER.**

DANIEL ii. 17–19 ; Acts xii. 1–10. —
The opening of the second chapter of Daniel informs us that “in the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams, wherewith his spirit was troubled, and his sleep brake from him. Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the astrologers, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, for to show the king his dreams.”

Now, when all the wise men above named were unable to tell the king, in the first place, what he had dreamed, and in the next, the interpretation of it,

“the king was angry and very furious, and commanded to destroy all the wise men of Babylon. And the decree went forth that the wise men should be slain ; and they sought Daniel and his fellows to be slain. Then Daniel answered with counsel and wisdom to Arioch, the captain of the king’s guard, which was gone forth to slay the wise men of Babylon. He answered, and said to Arioch the king’s captain, Why is the decree so hasty from the king ? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel. Then Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would give him time, and that he would show the king the interpretation.” And then follows what is of immediate instruction to us in the matter of Intercessory prayer. “Then Daniel went to his house, and made the thing known to Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions, *that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven* concerning this secret ; that Daniel

and his fellows should not perish with the rest of the wise men of Babylon." Mark the result. "*Then was the secret revealed unto Daniel* in a night vision. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven." (Dan. ii. 12-19.)

Daniel asked for the prayers of his companions. *They prayed* for him (and for themselves also — for *their* life was concerned in the matter as well as his), and God granted their request. The purport of their prayer was, that God would work a *miracle* — and a miracle was *wrought*. That which had appeared to Nebuchadnezzar in the quickly fading colors of a "*dissolving view*," was painted upon the mind of Daniel in a permanent form. "What man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man, which is in Him?" (1 Cor. ii. 11.) Who can tell the fleeting thoughts that have passed through the mind of another? Who can make a copy of the evanescent pictures that

may have suddenly been traced upon the imagination of another, and as suddenly have disappeared? And yet this is what the spirit of God enabled Daniel to do. And if the present were an age of miracles, this is what the Lord's people might *still* have power to do, whenever it was for the glory of God. But the chief point of interest to *us* in this narrative is, not that God wrought a miracle by means of Daniel, but that *He heard and answered prayer*, and prayer of such a nature as *we* are continually called upon to offer — prayer, not for the pardon of sin, nor yet that the consciousness of sin may be effected in a certain soul, but that God would bestow special wisdom, understanding, and grace, where they are specially required. We may often have a Christian friend, or know of some servant of God, who, from being brought into special contact with the enemies of the truth (and they, perhaps, men of great mental

power and acuteness), may require, in a more than ordinary degree, to have the "wisdom of the serpent," together with "the harmlessness of the dove." He may be in circumstances, where it is particularly necessary for him to have the Word of God at his command, for the establishing of sound doctrine, and the confounding of error, or where he may specially need to have the mind of God for the direction of his practical conduct. Now, the discernment of the doctrine of the grace of God, and the spirit of consistent Christian conduct, are as much the gift of God as was the revelation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream to the mind of Daniel; in point of fact, they partake quite as much of a miraculous nature (compared with any inherent quality of the mind of man) as did any of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit, formerly bestowed upon the Church — the only difference being *this*, that miracles, *commonly* so called,

concern *physical* nature, or the properties of the natural mind ; whereas the miracles of grace have to do with "*the hidden man of the heart.*" And this teaches us the very important lesson, that, in all our pursuit after sound doctrine, or holy practice, we must throw ourselves altogether upon the same Divine power, that enabled Daniel to recall the dream to the mind of Nebuchadnezzar, and to interpret it also.

How often are we asked by word, or by letter, to pray for a friend ! Such requests are often made—but, alas ! much oftener replied to—*as a matter of course*, without either party reflecting what the one asks for, and the other promises to perform. But whether the request be made in deep earnestness or not, this ought to make no difference in the manner, with which it is taken up. Every such request ought to send us in sincerity to the throne of grace, and the less it is felt by them who prefer it, the

more earnestly ought it to be carried out by *us*. Nothing has a worse effect upon our spiritual sensibility, than to disregard, or put by as a commonplace desire, the expression of such a wish on the part of a friend. If David could say, when Shimei cursed him, "*The Lord hath said unto him, Curse David*" (2 Sam. xvi. 10), how much more may it be said, when we are asked to pray for another, "*The Lord hath said unto him, Ask for their prayers?*" It is one of the many ways in which the Lord says unto us, "*Seek ye my face;*" let us not fail to answer, "*Thy face, Lord, will I seek.*" (Ps. xxvii. 8.) We may set it down as a fact, that the degree of importance, which we attach to such requests, is an unerring index of the value that we attach to prayer for ourselves; for, as we cannot have a desire to save our own souls without being concerned for the souls of others, neither can we value the throne of grace for ourselves,

without, in some degree, making use of it for the necessities of others ; and the proportion of the one feeling will always show itself in the amount of the other.

Let us then consider it, not only as a special duty laid upon us, but still more as a *privilege* put in our way, when a friend says, “*Pray for us.*” (1 Thess. v. 25.) For there is no possible amount of wisdom, that God cannot bestow upon the brethren — no possible degree of difficulty out of which He cannot rescue them — in answer to our prayers. Our hands may often hang down, when we consider the feebleness of the human instrument, together with the fierceness of the temptations, or the greatness of the embarrassments, to which it may be exposed ; but we must at such times think of Daniel, and the intercession of his three friends. God had ordained that Daniel should know the secret, when his friends prayed for him, as

much as He had determined that Abimelech, and the friends of Job should be pardoned, when Job and Abraham, respectively, prayed for them ; and how do we know but that God is often, in like manner, waiting for *our* prayers, to bestow grace, and wisdom unspeakable, upon our friends or brethren, when they are in special need of the same ? “ The Lord God is a sun and shield ; the Lord will give grace and glory ; no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly.” (Ps. lxxxiv. 11.)

But, as I have hinted above, our prayers should not be confined to the case of those who formally request them ; but, whenever we know of any of the Lord’s servants being placed in circumstances specially to require it, we should bear their burdens, and take them to the throne of grace ; and so fulfil the apostolic charge, “ Praying always, with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto

with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; and for me, that *utterance may be given unto me*, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the Gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds; that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.” (Eph. vi. 18–20.) And again: “Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving; *withal praying also for us*, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds.” (Col. iv. 2, 3.) How much do ministers of the Gospel, and missionaries require—how much do they virtually *ask* for our prayers! This is a case, in which, as in the general question of Christian love, there is a continual debt owing on our part, and in which, therefore, there should be continual payment made.

Of a kindred nature with the Scrip-

ture history, which we have just been considering, is the delivery of Peter from prison, in answer to the prayers of God's people. It is thus recorded in Acts xii. : —

“ Now about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the Church. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him ; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people. Peter, therefore, was kept in prison.” The sacred narrative does not proceed, *at once*, to tell us how it pleased God to deliver Peter from prison ; but between the narrative of that part of the history, and that, which we have just considered, there is interposed *one short sentence*, to

which great importance must be attached by the Spirit, else He would not have indited it in that place. It is this — “*But prayer was made without ceasing of the Church unto God for him.*” This, then, was *one* link in the chain of events connected with the deliverance of Peter from prison — as much a link, and as indispensable toward the accomplishment of God’s purpose, as were any of the succeeding minutiae in that marvellous transaction of his providence. It is as much as to say that God could not (according to the laws of His own providence and grace, specially designed for that occasion) deliver Peter from prison *without the prayers of the Church.* The mission of the angel to the prison, where Peter was bound, was as much a direct consequence of those prayers, as the chains falling off Peter’s hands, and the iron gate opening “*of his own accord,*” were the result of that mission. Oh, what an exalted view this gives us of

the privilege of prayer ! It is not only a proof of our dependence upon God for the exercise of His bounty and providence, but also of the wondrous dignity, to which God has raised his people — that they should be *intelligent fellow-workers* with Him in the carrying out of His purpose.

In the case of Peter, as in that of Daniel, a *miracle* was wrought *in answer to prayer*. “ When Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains,” — probably each of Peter’s hands being bound by a chain to one hand of either of the soldiers, that guarded him, — “ and the keepers before the door kept the prison,” most likely walking to and fro, as sentinels on guard. Whether the soldiers were thrown into a preternatural sleep, or their eyes were “ holden,” that they should not see what was done, we are not informed ; but let us only consider

what it was for a prisoner, *thus chained and guarded*, to be set at liberty without the attention of his keepers being roused; that the massive prison door should open "of his own accord," there being neither sight nor sound connected with it, to meet the *eye*, or to fall upon the *ear*, of the sentinels on watch — the wards of the ponderous lock requiring no key to turn them, but the will of Him who could say to the winds and the waves, "Peace, be still" (and they obeyed 'Him) — the door moving in silence on its mighty hinges as instinctively, as the ordering of the universe turns upon the word of Him, who made the heaven and the earth.

The Church had *prayed* for the deliverance of Peter. Doubtless they *believed* the Lord's power to save him, or they would not thus have prayed. And *yet*, when Peter stood without, knocking at the door of the house where they were assembled, they could not,

for a while, be persuaded that it was Peter himself, who, as they thought, was still shut up in prison. This shows us that the saints of old, as well as ourselves, had cause to say, "Lord, I believe; *help Thou mine unbelief.*"

We may extend the application of this Scripture example to the case of every difficulty — whether mental or physical, temporal or spiritual — in which God's people may be placed. David prays, "Bring my soul *out of prison.*" (Ps. cxlii. 7.) Many are the circumstances of mind, body, or estate, that may arise, as so many prisons in which to confine us — as so many fetters, to restrain us from what we consider the useful employment of our time, and energies, and the means of giving glory to God in our day, and generation. For all such cases, whether in ourselves, or for others, prayer may be made in submission to the will of God; and the more we believe God's

power of deliverance, the more we glorify His holy name by doing so.

But here, as in all other cases for prayer, we must not omit to notice *one* thing mentioned regarding the prayers of the Church for Peter: "But prayer was made *without ceasing* of the Church unto God for him." Oh, how easy is it to *faint* in prayer, how hard to *persevere*! "And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them. And he said unto the king of Israel, Smite upon the ground. And he smote thrice, *and stayed*. And the man of God was wroth with him, and said, Thou shouldst have smitten *five or six times*; *then* hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas *now* thou shalt smite Syria but thrice." (2 Kings xiii. 18, 19.) How often do *we* take the arrows, and smite upon the ground; but how soon do we *give over* smiting! Hence the small effect of our prayers. We must not only pray for the ob-

ject that we have at heart, but we must pray for *perseverance in prayer*. Would it not be a good rule to make this a special subject of remembrance in our prayers — that God would give us grace, *to persevere in them?* Is there not, as it were, a niche in heaven for each and every prayer, that we ought to make, waiting to be filled by our performance of the duty? Let us not delay, then, so to fill them up; and may we apply to the habit of prayer, as to all other graces of the Spirit, that blessed declaration of our Lord, “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that *your fruit should remain*; that *whatsoever ye should ask of the Father in my name, He may give it you.*” (John xv. 16.)

Paul, or rather *the Spirit*, by the word of Paul, exhorts us to pray for the brethren under the circumstances particularly considered in this division of our subject, when he writes, “Finally,

brethren, *pray for us*, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: and *that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men*: for all men have not faith.” (2 Thess. iii. 1, 2.) But it is not only in times of special difficulty, or temptation, that the Lord’s people ought to pray for one another. They are *never* able to stand in their own strength—*never* beyond the reach of temptation, nor, consequently, beyond the possibility of falling; and, therefore, they can never be above the necessity of our prayers. Paul writes to the Hebrews, “*Pray for us; for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.*” (Heb. xiii. 18.) He may have said this, partly to show the Hebrews that there was encouragement for them to pray on his behalf, seeing what God had done already for him; but it also sets forth that the more the conscience of a Christian is “*void of offence,*” the more it calls for our

prayers, that it may be *kept* so. Let us, then, guard against the mistake of only praying for the unconverted, or for those who are under peculiar trial ; and, as we know our own infirmities, and our own continual necessity for grace and strength, let us be earnest in prayer for our *Christian brethren*, that they may be “ kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation, ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Peter i. 5.)

The Intercessory prayers of the apostle for the *Ephesians* are very instructive in this respect, and are at the same time perfect models for imitation, as to the nature of the requests to be preferred, “ Wherefore I also, *after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints*, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers ; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom, and revelation in the knowledge of Him : the eyes of your understanding

being enlightened ; that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead," etc. (Eph. i. 15-23.) And again : " For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man ; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." (Eph iii. 14-19.)

CHAPTER VI.

MOSES INTERCEDING FOR AARON AND
MIRIAM.—DAVID PRAYING FOR THE
PEOPLE ; ABRAHAM FOR ABIMELECH.

NUMBERS xii. 13-16.—Among all those who have a special claim upon our prayers, none have a higher than those *who have sinned against ourselves* ; and of this we have a beautiful practical example in the case of Moses praying for Miriam. “ Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses, because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married ; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. And they said, Hath the Lord indeed only spoken by Moses ? — hath He not spoken also by *us* ? ” How much there was in the conduct of Miriam

and Aaron to rouse the wrathful emotions of flesh and blood, is implied by the way in which Scripture notices the conduct of Moses in not resenting the injurious conduct of his brother and sister. “Now *the man Moses was meek*, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth” (verse 3), meaning that it required all the meekness of Moses to bear such treatment after a godly sort.

It is added, after the mention of the injurious language used by Miriam and Aaron, “*And the Lord heard it*” (verse 2), and Moses *knew* that the Lord heard it. He knew, moreover, that he had only to commit the matter to the Lord, and that He would undertake for him. Such also was *David's* conviction when Shimei cursed him, and cast stones at him, and at his servants. Instead of reviling Shimei in return, he walked in the way of Him, “*who, when he was reviled, reviled not again* ; when

He suffered, He threatened not ; but *committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously.*" (1 Peter ii. 23.) For David said, " Let him alone, and let him curse ; for the Lord hath bidden him. It may be that the Lord will look on mine affliction, and that the Lord will requite me good for his cursing this day." (2 Sam. xvi. 11, 12.)

"Be still, and know that I am God." (Ps. xlvi. 10.) *Such* exhortation did the Spirit breathe into the ear of Moses, and said to him, as Jahaziel, the son of Zechariah, said, by the Spirit, to Jehoshaphat, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem : *"Ye shall not need to fight in this battle ; set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you for the Lord will be with you."* (2 Chron. xx. 17.) And the Lord *did* fight for Moses. He humbled to the dust before him the rebellious spirit of his brother and sister, afflicting the latter with a humiliating disease ;

and all that Moses had to do was *to pray*—that the Lord would pardon their sin against God, and against himself.

But the case of Moses, here recorded, is not in anywise singular, as regards either the disposing of God's providence, or the duty of His people. If we receive an injury, in word or deed, at the hand of another, does not the Lord see and hear it? Are *we* required, any more than Moses, to take the matter into our own hand, and to forget the injunction, “Vengeance is mine; *I will repay, saith the Lord?*” (Rom. xii. 19.)

Ah! the only difference between us and Moses in such circumstances is, that it cannot of *us*, as it was of him, be added, in a noble parenthesis, (“Now the man Moses was *very meek*, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.”) *We* are apt to take the matter out of the Lord's hand — and if so, the battle must be fought on *our* terms, not *His*. Hence, on such occa-

sions, we come off worsted at the hand of the enemy ; for in unduly resisting the injury of a fellow-creature, we unwittingly enter into conflict with Satan himself, and, at such times, as we always fight in our own strength, no wonder that we smart for it. Hence we come out of the fray with wounded tempers, and a disordered soul, and the greatest mercy that God can then bestow upon us, is to hold us up to our own selves, as a monument of folly and of mistaken principle. Oh ! that we could always remember, when thus tempted, that our strength " is to sit still " — to commit ourselves to Him that " judgeth righteously " — and that our highest *privilege*, as well as our bounden *duty*, is to " *pray* for them that despitefully use us, and persecute us." (Matt. v. 44.) When we thus let the Lord fight for us, we come off with what, under such circumstances, is the noblest trophy of victory — *an unruffled*

spirit — and we experience the fulfilment of that blessed promise, “The *meek* also shall *increase their joy* in the earth ; and the poor among men shall rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.” (Isa. xxix. 19.) These are the *blood-less* victories of the soul — the greatness (through the Spirit of God) of him “that ruleth his own spirit.” (Prov. xvi. 32.) The effects of such victories are sung in heaven itself, their incense being shed abroad before the throne, from the “vials full of odors, which are the prayers of saints.”

There ought to be something peculiarly painful to us in seeing others humbled on our account. When Moses looked in the face of his sister Miriam, and saw it covered with a loathsome disease, he must have felt it very distressing to himself. True, she had sinned still more against God than against *him* ; yet this was by means of an offence committed immediately

against himself. This must have led Moses to pray *very earnestly* that she might be forgiven. And when we see a fellow-sinner covered with confusion — convicted, either by the judgment of God in the conscience, or at the tribunal of man — of having sinned against us, how tenderly ought we to feel towards such an one! Our poor brother has struck his foot against some projecting angle of our humanity, and it has wounded him to the very quick. Had *we* not been in his path, he had not stumbled; and so we should pity him more than if he had been wounded in some other way. We should carry his humiliation to the throne of grace, praying God to pardon his sin — if an *unbeliever*, that the Spirit may give him faith in a crucified Saviour — if a sincere *Christian*, that the blood of Christ may be applied *afresh* to his conscience — that so his wounds may be healed.

We have an instance, similar to that

of Moses and Miriam, in the case of *Jeroboam's* hand being withered when he stretched it forth against the man of God, and how, at the intercession of the latter, it “was restored him again, and became as it was before.” (1 Kings xiii. 4-6.) In this case *Jeroboam* *asked* the man of God to intreat the Lord for him. And when we see a brother or a sister smarting in spirit, from having stretched out the hand of an evil temper, or an unworthy feeling, against ourselves,—when we see the right-hand of their spiritual energy withered, in consequence, by depression, or some other unhealthy action of the soul, does not the very sight of this say to our hearts, “Intreat now the face of the Lord thy God, and *pray for me*, that my hand may be restored me again?” (Verse 6.) Oh, how much we lose by not encouraging, and acting with, such tenderness of spirit! What a stern, inexorable thing is flesh! How

unwilling to forget its own wounds in those of another! And the poor foolish heart thus binds its own misery around itself, instead of throwing it off at once by having compassion upon those who have done us wrong. How often do we, with our own hand, drive the weapon still deeper into the flesh, when, by prayer and the spirit of forgiveness, we might at once have been healed ourselves, and have healed our brother also.

It were an excellent practical rule for us to carry into effect, that the *moment* any one offends us, we should endeavor, by the grace of God, to lift up our hearts in prayer for him, as David says : “For my love they are mine enemies ; but *I give myself unto prayer.*” (Ps. cix. 4.) David spake this prophetically of our blessed Lord, and we have the prophetic prayer confirmed by that, which He Himself offered up when hanging on the cross,—“Father, forgive them,

for they know not what they do.” (Luke xxiii. 34.) And holy Stephen in like manner prayed for his murderers, not faintly, but urgently ; for “ he kneeled down, and *cried with a loud voice*, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.” (Acts vii. 60.)

I have said that we ought to pray for those who injure us, *the very moment* that we receive the injury. But if we are to do this, it can only be by our *living* in the habitual practice of the mind of Christ. We cannot expect that a storm of angry feeling, rising in the breast, can be *suddenly* hushed into the calm of prayer. But we *may* expect that, by perseverance in striving to bring “ into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ ” (2 Cor. x. 5), and by “ watching ” the infirmities of our own hearts, “ unto prayer,” the storm may habitually be averted — or, at all events, that it may not rise in such force as to carry us off our feet,

and prevent our having recourse in time to Him, who can say to "the winds and waves" of our angry passions, "Peace, be still!" An *instantaneous* check will do mighty things on such occasions. David says: "*I made haste, and delayed not to keep Thy commandments.*" (Ps. cxix. 60.) So, if when we receive an injury, we can only remember, through the gracious warning of the Spirit, that it is our duty to pray for him, who injures us, let us do it *at once*; an *instant's* delay may make it too late, — we must *make haste* to keep down the iron spring of angry passion with the strong hand of prayer. This may seem to be (and doubtless it is), an arduous exercise of self-denial, but *all* things are "*possible to him that believeth,*" and if we desire to be "*faithful in much,*" we must be faithful "*in that which is least.*" (Luke xvi. 10.) Let us practise this rule upon occasions, on which we can hardly be said to have received

injuries — the many little occasions in family and social life, on which we may happen to be put out of our way, by means of others (whether intentionally or unintentionally) thwarting our wishes, — when the clashing of contending interests, even in trifles, assumes, for the moment, an air of serious import in the mind — or when the severe expression of opposite opinions grows, unwittingly, into all the painful development of self-exaltation, or wounded pride. If, on all such occasions, we could only remember to *pray* secretly for those, with whom we are thus brought into collision, we should not only feel the comfort of it in our own souls — not only would the wheels of family and social intercourse move more sweetly upon the axis of Christian principle, but we should be prepared, on occasions when *real* injury is inflicted, to betake ourselves at once to prayer. Ah, Reader, past experience might lead you and me to say, “Who is

sufficient for these things?" But our strength is in God.

It were also a good thing for us to consider that the *very act* of injury is a call for our prayers on behalf of him, who inflicts it. We must say, as David did of Shimei, "*God hath bid him do it*," not only to try our faith, but also with a view of calling forth *Intercessory prayer*. If the person had not injured us, he would not, perhaps, have come into our mind, and *then* we should not have had the opportunity of praying for him: and if God is pleased to take this way of bringing him before us, let us not refuse to answer God's purpose by withholding prayer on his behalf; but rather let us forget self, and the wounds of self, in the recognition of the hand of God, and of the purpose of His will. Let us soar above the mists of our own petty feelings, and instead of harboring the resentful thoughts of an imbibited spirit, let us *at once* pray for those who injure us,

“ that we may be the children of our Father which is in heaven, for He maketh His sun to rise on the evil, and on the good ; and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust. Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father, which is in heaven, is perfect.” (Matt. v. 44-48.)

We have just considered the duty of praying for those *who have injured us*, but Intercessory prayer is, perhaps, never so eloquent, never so painfully urgent, as when we have, by our own sin or folly, been the means of *injury to others*. On such occasions the soul stands amazed at its own powers of evil, and is lost in anguish, at reflecting on the mysterious results of one false step in judgment, or right feeling. It smarts tenfold with the smart of him, whom it has injured, and embodies, in the compound nature of its emotions, a mixture

of remorse, and sympathy, indescribable. We have a lively example of such intercession in the case of *David*, when he had *numbered Israel*, to their sorrow, and his own shame. True, Israel had grievously revolted from the Lord, and the sacred history informs us that God's anger was kindled against Israel, and that "*He moved David* against them, saying, Go, number Israel and Judah." (2 Sam. xxiv. 1.) And, in another version of the same history, we are told that "*Satan* stood up against Israel, and *provoked David* to number Israel." (1 Chron. xxi. 1.) Yet neither the secret purpose of God, nor the permitted influence of Satan, in anywise controlled the free agency of David, nor made his sin the less. Hear the bitter accents in which he confesses his sin, and intercedes for Israel: "*And David said unto God, Is it not I, that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned, and done evil*

indeed : but *as for these sheep, what have they done?* Let thine hand, I pray thee, be on me, and on my father's house ; *but not on thy people*, that they should be plagued." (1 Chron. xxi. 17.) But if Intercessory prayer is, at such times, accompanied with more pain than at others, it is, perhaps, never offered up with a more entire renunciation of all self-righteousness, or thought of being heard for one's own sake. The soul is covered with its own shame—humbled to the very dust—and its earnest, agonizing desire that he, whom it has injured, should not suffer for its sake, together with the deep conviction that it is wholly unworthy of being heard on his behalf, makes it throw itself with intense ardor upon the merits of Him, for whose sake alone its prayers can be accepted. It is "an evil thing, and a bitter" to sin against God, and a fellow-creature ; but sin deeply felt, and penitently acknowledged, imparts a won-

drous conviction of the vicarious offices of Jesus Christ.

Let the child of God *beware*, on such occasions, how he suffers a sense of guilt to interfere with the exercise of intercessory supplication. *Abraham* had deeply injured *Abimelech* and his subjects; yet *he was commanded of God to intercede for them, and his prayer was heard.* (Gen. xx. 7, 17.) *David*, also, in the instance before us, had sinned against God, and against *Israel*, and *his prayer was also heard.* Reader, if thou art situated as *Abraham* and *David* were—“*Go thou, and do likewise.*”

CHAPTER VII.

MOSES INTERCEDING FOR ISRAEL. —
AARON AND HUR AT REPHIDIM.

EXODUS xxxii. 9-14.—“*And the Lord said unto Moses, I have seen this people, and behold it is a stiff-necked people; now therefore let me alone that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them; and I will make of thee a great nation. And Moses besought the Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth Thy wrath wax hot against Thy people? . . . turn from Thy fierce wrath, and repent of this evil against thy people. And the Lord repented of the evil which He thought to do unto His people.*”

We have seen how God, on two

special occasions, *commanded* Intercessory prayer to be offered—viz., in the case of Abimelech, and of the friends of Job. And in this passage from the history of Moses, and of the children of Israel, we have presented in another point of view, in the bold fore-shortening of Scripture perspective, the importance which the Lord attaches to Intercessory prayer. “*Now therefore let me alone*, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them.” This was as much as to say, that if he *did* intercede for the people, God could not do otherwise than pardon ; and it was said, not to repress, but to encourage, Intercessory prayer on the part of Moses. In fact, it was a direct invitation to him to “take hold of” the “strength” of the Lord, that he might “make peace” with Him for rebellious Israel ; and he *did* make peace with Him. (Isa. xxvii. 5.) It was a challenge to him to wrestle with

God, that, "as a prince," he might have "power with God," and prevail. (Gen. xxxii. 24-28.) It was the Beloved saying to the soul of His servant, "*Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me.*" (Cant. vi. 5.) The "*Let Me alone*" was a far more eloquent permission to intercede, than the most direct injunction so to do; because it unfolded more of the secret machinery of God's way with His people, and threw a stronger light upon the effectual working of Intercessory prayer. If God give a praying soul but an inch of ground to stand upon, He thereby invites it to press on, till it find its feet set "*in a large room.*" Does God say, "*Let me alone?*" This means, "*Come now*, and let us reason together;" it means, "*Ask*, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you;" it means, "*Ask of me things to come* concerning my sons, and concern-

ing the work of my hands *command ye me.*" (Isa. xlv. 11.) It means in spirit, "Let me *not* alone ; arise, contend thou before the mountains, and let the hills hear thy voice" (Micah vi. 1), in the urgency of thy petitions. A soul may say, "But cannot I be too urgent with God ? May He not be displeased with me for pressing my suit with so much importunity ?" *Impossible*, utterly *impossible* ; and for *this* reason, that you cannot ask any thing of God in the spirit of adoption and humble faith, but you give glory to his attributes, and exalt His name. David says, "I will worship toward Thy holy temple, and praise Thy name for Thy loving-kindness, and for Thy truth ; for *Thou hast magnified Thy word above all Thy name.*" (Ps. cxxxviii. 2.) The Word unfolds the mercy of God — His goodness and loving-kindness, His long-suffering and truth, as displayed in Jesus Christ ; and this embodying of His love to sinners has

God magnified far above all the other attributes of the Godhead. Therefore it is a gross contradiction in terms, to say that we can magnify too much what God has magnified ; every petition, that we urge at the throne of grace, gives glory to what He has glorified ; and the more urgent we are (in the genuine spirit of humility), and the more we are resolved to take *no denial* from His mercy, the more we exalt His glorious name. “ *Let Me alone!* ” “ *No!* ” saith the humble yet believing soul, “ *never*, as long as I have any thing, O God, to ask, that is according to Thy will ; *never*, as long as the souls, for whom I plead, are in the land of the living : *never* will I loose the hem of Thy garment, *never* will I believe that Thou wouldest have me to let Thee alone.” Oh ! the blessedness of persevering in prayer — of hoping against hope — of the petition growing in urgency from the “ *Let Me alone!* ” — from Jesus answering us “ *never a*

word !” Oh ! the noble arguments, that the soul gathers from being brought to reason with its own despondency — the jewels of promise, that it finds among what appeared to be the ruins of its anticipations — the fresh impetus that it derives from the elasticity, and upward spring, of having brought itself into more immediate contact with the attributes of the Almighty ! And this *must* be the effect, when the soul is forced back by the consciousness of its own despondency, and unbelief, upon the loving-kindness and unchangeable character of God.

The prayers of Moses *did* prevail, after a long series of renewed intercessions, to obtain pardon both for Aaron individually (see Deut. ix. 20) and for the whole congregation. This is intended to teach us that no amount of apostasy, whether individual or national, should prevent our coming before the Lord with the offering of Intercessory

prayer. Many, in this our day, are given to the sin of idolatry—some bowing down to the love of *gold*—some worshipping the god of *pleasure*—some swearing allegiance to the goddess of *reason*—others led away by a withering *superstition*. Let us not think any of them beyond the pale of grace, or the call for our *prayers*.

Again, *England*, as a nation, in its legislative acts, as well as in its collective practice, has departed more and more from the simple, downright Protestantism of its once glorious Constitution. Neither has it given glory to God for its immunity from public calamity, for the success of its armies, for the abundance of its wealth, or the prosperity of its commerce; but it may be said of *us*, as of a sinful nation of old, “They sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous.” (Hab. i. 16.) “For he saith, By the strength of my hand I

have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent ; and I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man : and my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people : and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth.” (Isaiah x. 13, 14.)

The Christians of England ought to be much in prayer for their native land, their Queen, for the Ministers of State, for both branches of the Legislature, and for all who have any influence in directing the public acts of the nation. We should imitate the example of Moses ; and though the Lord may seem to say, “*Let Me alone*, that my wrath may wax hot against them, and that I may consume them,” let us plead with Him on the ground of His former mercies to the nation, of the wondrous privileges that it has received at His hand, in the preaching of the everlasting Gospel, and in the circulation of the Word

of God ; and entreat Him earnestly and perseveringly not to remove our candle-stick from the midst of us — not to bring us to shame before the nations of the earth, lest they should say, that “for mischief” He did exalt us, that He might cast us down forever. (See Exod. xxxii. 11-13.)

But in times of peculiar national danger, and when God is evidently pouring out his judgments on the land, such Intercessory prayer seems called for in a more than ordinary way. Such seasons are brought before us very forcibly by the occasion when “Moses said unto Aaron, Take a censer, and put fire therein from off the altar, and put on incense, and go quickly into the congregation, and make an atonement for them : for there is wrath gone out from the Lord ; the plague is begun. And Aaron took as Moses commanded, and ran into the midst of the congregation ; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people : and he put on in-

cense, and made an atonement for the people. *And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed.*" (Numb. xvi. 46-48.)

This act of Aaron was, in the first place, an eminent type of the atonement and intercession made by *Christ* for His people. As the incense, rising from Aaron's censer, arrested the infection of the plague, and severed between the dead and the living, so does the effectual incense of Christ's merits sever each soul of His redeemed people from the plague of unregenerate nature, and eternal death. But surely it may also be considered as emblematical of Christian duty, how, in cases of family or public trial, we should "put on" the incense of intercessory prayer, and stand "between the dead and the living;" if, peradventure, God would stay the pestilential epidemic, the famine, the commercial crisis, or the defeat of our armies before the enemy. And, whether we consider it as regarding a family, a

neighborhood, or an entire nation, we must remember that it is only by taking the incense of *Christ Himself*—only by pleading the merits of His righteousness and atonement—that we can, by Intercessory prayer, stand between the dead and the living. And have *we* been without instances of late years, in which both pestilence and famine seemed to be stayed in answer to prayer and national humiliation? And, if the annals of every praying individual, family, or community, could be searched, how many instances of such answers to prayer might be adduced! We have not the same confidence in coming before the Lord for things *physical* and *external* as for things *spiritual*, because we know not whether we are asking what is really according to His will; but we know that it is quite according to God's will that we should, even in earthly things, trust His power, and venture upon His goodness, leaving it to Him to determine whether the

thing asked for be consistent with the resolves of His eternal providence.

“Believe ye that *I am able* to do this?” (Matt. ix. 28.) This is to be the rule of our faith — the measure of our petitions. There can be no doubt, I think, that the lives of *all* the shipmates of Paul were saved *in answer to his prayers*; for it is said, “Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Cæsar; and lo, God *hath given thee* all them that sail with thee.” (Acts xxvii. 24.) This *might* mean that God had given them to him *spiritually*, by the conversion of their souls; but as we cannot suppose this to have been the case, and as they *were* all saved from shipwreck, it must be the latter that is meant. And in what sense could they be *given* to Paul, but as in answer to his *prayers*? Two hundred and seventy-six persons saved from shipwreck, in answer to *the prayers of one soul!* And if so, why should not the intercessions of *other* praying souls be the means

of saving families, communities, or nations, from famine and pestilence, from commercial ruin, and the horrors of war? As long as God's power is almighty, and no limits are assigned to the effects of prayer, one soul may take within the grasp of its intercessions the whole world, as regards any thing that can exalt the power, the wisdom, and the goodness of God, whether in supplying the temporal wants, in mitigating the sufferings, or in extending the day of grace and the means of salvation to the souls, of sinful men.

Exodus xvii. 11, furnishes us with another event in the life of Moses, which forcibly illustrates the subject of intercessory prayer. On the occasion when Amalek came, and fought with Israel in Rephidim, Moses, Aaron, and Hur went up to the top of the hill. *“And it came to pass, when Moses held up his hand, that Israel prevailed; and when he let down his hand, Amalek pre-*

vailed." This is one of the clearest demonstrations to be met with in Scripture, that prayer has been fore-ordained of God as a link in the chain of His providential dispensations ; every motion of the hand of Moses, in its rising or falling, by the mysterious permission and appointment of God, told, in a manner not to be mistaken, upon the mind of Him, who ordereth all things in heaven and in earth. And when *Joshua* bid the sun stand still upon Gibeon, and the moon upon the valley of Ajalon (see *Joshua x.*), his prayer of faith acted in like manner upon the predetermined will of Jehovah, and was the *immediate* cause of the heavenly bodies being stayed in their wonted course. The only difference between Israel at Rephidim and God's people among *us*, is, that the former had to contend with a visible foe — the latter with an *invisible* ; "for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the

darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Eph. vi. 12.) And therefore our friends and brethren require our prayers at *all* times, and not merely at seasons of known or special emergency; and we should pray for them, as though the holding up of our hands were continually necessary for them, in order that they should prevail against their spiritual enemies.

The conduct of Aaron and Hur, in staying up the hands of Moses, illustrates the value of *social* intercessory prayer; and it is well for those who are equally interested in any subject of such prayers, to meet together, and strengthen one another's hands in their labors of intercessory love. This not only serves to quicken the spirit of prayer in each individual breast, where otherwise it might be inclined to droop; but it also serves to call down the blessing promised upon such united efforts, where it is said by our blessed Lord, "Again I

say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth, touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." (Matt. xviii. 19, 20.)

Another very touching illustration of the duty, and the effects of *social* intercessory prayer is to be found in the book of *Esther*, when *Mordecai* had sent to inform the Queen of the murderous intentions of *Haman* toward all the Jews of the captivity: "Then Esther bade them return to Mordecai this answer, *Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shusan, and fast ye for me*, and neither eat nor drink three days, night and day; *I also and my maidens will fast likewise.* So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded." (Esther iv. 15-17.) They, who would be encouraged in the practice of Intercessory prayer, whether private

or social, and who take pleasure in tracing proofs of *special providence*, will do well diligently to consider this affecting history. The prayers of the Church unlocked the prison-doors when *Peter* was to be set at liberty, and here the intercession of *Mordecai* and his friends, of *Esther* and her maidens, were made effectual, by "*the hand of the Lord*," to turn the king's heart as the rivers of "water," for it is written that God "turneth it whithersoever He will." (Prov. xxi. 1.) Not only were the unruly wills and affections of the king thus brought into subjection, but his *bodily* system also was made to feel the power of prayer. "On that night *the king could not sleep.*" God had a purpose in keeping him awake; and as well might he have tried to close his eyes in slumber, as *Jonah's* mariners, by rowing hard, to bring the ship to land when God forbade it. (Jonah i. 13.) Had the King slept on that occasion, he would not have "commanded to bring

the book of records of the Chronicles." Had not the book been brought, the King would not have "found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the King's chamberlains, the keepers of the door, who sought to lay hands on the King Ahasuerus." (Ver. 2.) Had the King not read this, Mordecai would not have been promoted to honor, and the way might not have been opened for Esther to declare to the King the mischievous devices of Haman against her and her people, who must thus have been cruelly put to death. (See Esther vi. 7, 8.) As we have had occasion to remark before, prayer moved the secret spring of God's eternal purpose, and this, again, set in motion the whole of the machinery of Providence, by means of which it was to be accomplished. May we not say with the Psalmist, "*Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.*" (Psalm cvii. 43.)

CHAPTER VIII.

CONCLUSION.

AND now, as the intention of the foregoing pages was, not to write a volume, but merely to throw out a few hints upon the subject of Intercessory prayer, it is time that they should be brought to an end. If the reader think it strange that many Scripture instances, bearing on the subject, have been passed over, and that others have been but *cursorily* noticed, which might have been considered more at large, this little volume can only crave his forbearance, and submit itself, with all its faults, to his good-will. If it should, by the blessing of God, be made the means of inciting to the habit of Intercessory prayer *one*

soul, that has hitherto neglected that important duty, the charge of omission, or of any other fault connected with the execution of the work, will be thankfully borne.

One concluding remark may not be unacceptable, as serving to impress this subject more deeply upon our minds. There are many graces and duties, in which we may follow the example of Jesus in the days of his *flesh*; but there is only one office recorded, in which we can imitate Him in His work *above*, and that is *by interceding for others at the throne of grace*. As the smoke of His “much incense” is continually ascending from the golden censer, so may we ever send forth our intercessions to take their place in the vials full of odors, which are “the prayers of saints.” In no way can we act more simply upon the conviction, or more practically realize to ourselves that we are “*risen with Christ*, and seeking those things which

are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." May the Lord pour out this, and all other graces, upon His Church, and to His name be all the glory and the praise ! Amen.

